From Brady to Murphy: Gun control polarization in the decades since the 103rd Congress



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Abstract

Over the course of twelve Congressional sessions and twenty plus years since the passage of landmark gun control legislation (the Brady Bill and the Assault weapons ban) during the 103rd Congress, (1993-1994) polarization on the gun control issue between the Democratic and Republican parties has increased significantly. Applying mixed qualitative methods, this case study aims to explain the shift from moderate levels during the 103rd to near complete partisan polarization on the issue by the 115th Congress (2017-2018). It will demonstrate that this shift was the culmination of the dissolution of opposition groups (consisting of members who crossed the party line in their gun issue voting) within each party, with each party following its own unique polarization trajectory, as disparate factors influenced their respective shifts. For the Republican party, who united on the issue over a decade before the Democratic party, the key variables impacting the fading of party support for gun control were the decline in salience of crime as a priority political issue in the early 2000s and the transition from the general to the primary electorate as the more salient voting bloc in regard to gun control. For the Democratic party, the key variables impacting the fading of party opposition to gun control were a loss of Southern and rural seats, coupled with gun control being re established as an electorally valuable issue for the party nationally in the years after the Sandy Hook shooting in late 2012. The thesis will contest the prevailing narrative that changes in party voting patterns must occur through replacement by demonstrating evidence of conversion- as numerous members of both parties shifted positions on gun control to vote the party line as electoral pressures and incentives influencing opposition group member voting changed. Furthermore, the thesis's findings bolster the utility of 'partisan asymmetry' as a lens through which to approach the study of partisan polarization in Congress.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Methods

Part I: Introduction

On November 30, 1993, U.S President William J. Clinton signed into law the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, which mandated federal background checks on firearms purchasers and implemented a five-day waiting period for handgun purchases. Less than a year later on September 13, 1994, the Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act (more commonly referred to as the federal Assault weapons ban) was also signed into law by the president, prohibiting the manufacture and sale of certain types of semi-automatic firearms and large capacity ammunition magazines for civilian use. While the Congressional floor debate had been contentious, both pieces of gun control legislation passed with bipartisan support- a noteworthy outcome for a "hostile and increasingly partisan" (Sinclair 2006, 169) Congress in the midst of a political era in which each Congress was more ideologically and partisan polarized than the last (Poole and Rosenthal 2007). With bipartisan cooperation begetting the passage of what was considered the most significant federal gun controls in the nation's history, it appeared that despite the general trend of increasing partisan polarization in Congress, there was potential for continued bipartisanship on the gun control issue in the future.

Yet over the course of twelve Congressional sessions and twenty plus years since the passage of the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban during the 103rd Congress (1993-1994), polarization on the gun control issue between the Democratic and Republican parties has increased significantly. For example in 1993, 16 of 44 Republicans (36 percent) and 47 of 56 Democrats (84 percent) in the Senate voted for the Brady bill, while in 2016, only one of 54 Republicans (2 percent) supported the Murphy background checks amendment, while 41 of 44 Democrats did (93 percent). From 1993 to 2016, the measure of polarization[1] in the Senate on background checks legislation would nearly double (from .49 to .91), while in the House, the most recent gun votes (such as a 2017 vote on a 'concealed carry' gun rights bill) have also been significantly polarized- the aforementioned vote having a measure of

[1] On a scale of 0 to 1, a measure of polarization of 0 is not polarized, while a measure of 1 is completely polarized along party lines, with no individuals crossing the party line in their voting. Precisely how the measure of polarization for a roll call vote is determined in the thesis will be explained in the 'key terms' section of this Introduction on page 9.

polarization of .91, with 94 percent of House Republicans and only three percent of House Democrats voting in favor.

Since they first incorporated the issue into their respective party platforms beginning in 1968, the parties have maintained identifiable and distinct positions on gun control- the Democratic party advocating for gun regulations and restrictions on gun ownership, the Republican party for gun ownership (for law abiding citizens) free from government regulation (Spitzer 2012, 124). Yet despite the establishment of these platform positions, there nonetheless existed opposition groups within each party of members who crossed the party line in their gun control voting; it was the existence of these groups which kept polarization levels moderate and their dissolution over time (and particularly in the decades since the 103rd Congress) which has culminated in a state of hyper partisan polarization on gun control in the present. The primary research question of this thesis is as follows: What explains the shift from moderate levels to near complete partisan polarization on gun control at the Congressional level which has occurred in the decades since the passage of the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban during the 103rd Congress?

Why study Congressional gun control polarization?

The thesis will commence with a question of institutional focus- why study gun control polarization in Congress? Partisan polarization on gun control at the Congressional level and its impact on federal policy stagnation has risen to the forefront of political debate in the United States in the years since the Sandy Hook elementary school shooting of December 2012. But while there is an extensive academic literature on partisan polarization at the Congressional level, no studies have been published which analyze polarization on the gun control issue specifically. Yet beyond this lacuna in the literature, what makes such polarization worth studying in its own right? What about gun control polarization cannot be explained in the context of the existing polarization literature? To begin to answer these questions first requires an understanding of the relationship between partisan and ideological polarization.

Partisan vs. ideological polarization

First, it is essential to define the term partisan polarization and clarify how it differs from ideological polarization. Partisan polarization is a divergence in political issue

positions/roll call voting along party lines (Sinclair 2006, Gelman 2009, Levendusky 2009, Rosenfeld 2017). In this thesis, partisan polarization refers to polarization between the parties in Congress (elite polarization) although the term can also refer to polarization between partisans in the electorate (popular polarization) (Abramowitz 2010). Ideological polarization, on the other hand, refers to a divergence along ideological (liberal to conservative) lines (Poole and Rosenthal 1997, Levendusky 2009, Abramowitz 2010). In their seminal study *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll-Call Voting (1997),* Poole and Rosenthal developed a system called DW-nominate, the first dimension of which assigns values to each member of Congress on a scale of -1 (liberal) to 1 (conservative) based on an amalgamation of their roll call votes for a particular Congress. They determined that from the late 1970s up to the most recently completed Congress at the time of this writing (the 114th of 2015-2016), each successive Congress has been more unidimensional and ideologically polarized than the one that preceded it (Poole, Rosenthal, and Hare 2017).

While the terms are conceptually distinct, partisanship and ideology have come to be strongly linked as the Republican party has become the party of conservatives and the Democratic party that of liberals due to sorting (a process in which individuals align with the party that best fits their ideological preferences,[2] or when party members bring their ideological positions in line with their party affiliation) (Levendusky 2009). Overall, Congress today is both ideologically (with few centrists) and partisan (with few crossing party lines in roll call voting) polarized.

Gun control polarization: What the literature cannot explain

Political ideology and gun control

Given the alignment of partisanship with political ideology, scholars have argued that the dwindling number of centrists/political moderates in Congress over time (as these centrists leave Congress due to retirement or reelection loss and are replaced by more liberal or conservative representatives) has led to more partisan polarized roll call voting (Sinclair 2006, Poole and Rosenthal 2007, Levendusky 2009). This argument that increasing ideological polarization in Congress has translated into increasing partisan polarization is a

[2] The process that precipitated this sorting, referred to as party realignment in the academic literature, will be discussed in the Literature review chapter.

compelling one, but it cannot fully explain gun control polarization. For unlike other issues such as abortion where the relationship between issue positions and ideology were fixed (for example with conservatives being pro-life and liberals pro-choice), political ideology and gun control issue positions have not always aligned. While by the 103rd Congress most liberals supported gun control and most conservatives opposed it, as I will demonstrate in later chapters, during the gun control debates of the 1990s there was a contingent of liberal Democrats who opposed gun controls and conservative Republicans who supported them- individuals whose gun control voting was a deviation from an otherwise consistently conservative or liberal voting record. Relying solely on the increasing ideological polarization argument to explain increasing partisan polarization on gun control would require ignoring or negating these members, whose existence strongly indicated that there were factors influencing Congressional gun control voting which cut across political ideology.

And because of this incomplete alignment, the fading numbers of political moderates in Congress also cannot offer a sufficient explanation for increasing gun control polarization. While it was the case that many opposition group members (members who crossed the party line in their gun control voting) who left Congress in the decades after the 103rd were political moderates, the same can be said of many members of the party majority (members who did not cross the party line) who similarly left Congress. In other words, on an issue where there was not a fixed relationship between political ideology and issue positions, the loss of political moderates would not automatically or necessarily result in increasing partisan polarization.

While historically most conservatives have opposed gun control and most liberals have supported it, supporting gun control was not always grounds for having one's credibility as a conservative questioned (with even former president Ronald Reagan, who was known as the 'father of conservatism,' endorsing the passage of the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban)(Easton 1994) and likewise for liberals who were anti-control. Rather, there was a time when it was acceptable for one's gun control position to clash with their general political ideology and conservative or liberal voting record. In conclusion, a question unexplained by the general polarization literature remains: What factors were cutting across political ideology when it came to influencing Congressional gun control voting, and how has the

relationship between ideology and gun control issue positions changed over time? The thesis aims to answer these questions.

Replacement

Another way in which the existing literature is not sufficient for explaining or understanding gun control polarization has to do with the process of replacement. The prevailing viewpoint is that members of Congress, who want to avoid appearing "inconsistent and unprincipled," (Stimson 2004, 65) do not generally shift positions on issues over time, making turnover in Congress (replacement) the main agent of change in party voting (Stimson 2004, Adams 1997, Poole and Rosenthal 2007). Poole and Rosenthal (2007) write that "changes in Congressional voting patterns must occur almost entirely through the process of replacement of retiring or defeated legislators with new blood" because "the legislator has a constant position over time... members of Congress do not adapt their positions during their careers but simply enter and maintain a fixed position until they die, retire, or are defeated" (Poole and Rosenthal, 2007, 28, 97). While the latter argument is accurate in that members of Congress will not swing widely on the ideological continuum throughout their careers (ie liberals are not going to turn into conservatives over time and vice versa), in terms of the gun issue specifically, not all legislators have maintained a constant position over time. As will be demonstrated in later chapters, in addition to replacement, also critically contributing to changes in Congressional voting patterns and increasing partisan polarization on gun control over time was conversion- as members of both parties have come to shift positions on gun control in the decades since the 103rd Congress, bringing their gun control position in line with their party identification.

Additionally, Poole and Rosenthal (2007) note that replacement induces changes in policy "particularly through its effect on party control" (93). Yet as will be discussed in Chapter Five, despite gaining majority control of Congress and agenda setting power for the first time in nearly forty years during the 1994 midterm elections, the Republican party did not pursue major changes to alter gun policy for the remainder of that decade. For while due to replacement the makeup of Congress had undergone a significant change practically overnight, the electoral pressures and incentives influencing Congressional gun control voting had not. Ultimately, while tracking and analyzing replacement is a critical tool for understanding Congressional change over time, this process itself cannot shed light on the

political constraints impacting the agenda setting decisions of the majority party, nor explain why replacers might make different voting choices than the replaced.

Preview of thesis: Asymmetric party shifts

This thesis seeks to explain how and why Congress has become hyper polarized on the gun control issue in the decades since the passage of landmark federal gun control during the 103rd Congress. The fading of within-party opposition is the key causal process being studied- so what explains the dissolution of each party's minority opposition group[3] and the subsequent party shifts?

Unique polarization trajectories

As will be demonstrated throughout the thesis, each party's polarization trajectory was unique. For example, Republican support for gun control dissolved over time in a linear fashion, while the size of the Democratic party's minority opposition group waxed and waned over the timeframe of this study, the party eventually uniting in support of gun control over a decade after Republicans had united in opposition to it. This kind of partisan asymmetry has not evaded the notice of political scientists, who argue that the Democratic and Republican parties have "distinct electoral coalitions, campaign themes, group demands, and goals in office" (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016, 12) which foster differences in party behavior and outcomes. For gun control, the asymmetric nature of these polarization trajectories indicates that disparate factors influenced the waning of each party's minority opposition group. As will be seen, one of the primary electoral[4] pressures which has come to influence Republican voting on gun control has been a comparatively inconsequential concern for Democrats. Some factors (such as a realignment of the types of seats held by the parties) have impacted Democratic polarization to a greater degree than for Republicans, while the relationship between political ideology and gun issue positions has changed more (and thus impacted polarization more) for conservative Republicans than for liberal Democrats. And critically, as will be discussed in the closing chapter, these partisan asymmetries have implications for polarization stability, as one party's current state of unity on the issue is more stable than that

[3] What constitutes a minority opposition group will be explained in the 'key terms' section on page 10.
[4] In this thesis, the term 'electoral' is defined as being related to elections. Thus when reference is made to electoral pressures or incentives, I am referring to pressures and incentives which impact or which members of Congress perceive to be impacting their reelection prospects. The full definition and how it is used in the thesis will be explained in the 'key terms' section on page 10 of this Introduction.

of the other. Overall, the thesis will demonstrate that Democrats and Republicans faced unique inter-party dynamics and divergent electoral pressures and incentives in regard to the gun issue- dynamics, pressures, and incentives which evolved for each party at different times, but which eventually culminated in shifts in both parties and a state of hyper partisan polarization on the issue.

And despite their unique polarization trajectories, the Democratic and Republican shifts shared two key commonalities: The dissolution of their opposition groups were precipitated by the agenda setting decisions of party leaders and influenced by changing electoral pressures and incentives in regard to the gun issue over time. That the latter change occurred is best exemplified through evidence of conversion- which, as will be demonstrated, was abundant in both parties. The examples of Chris Shays and Ted Strickland provide a preview of this phenomenon.

Shifting positions on gun control

During his career in the House, suburban Republican Chris Shays (CT-4th) established himself as one of the most vocal gun control supporters in Congress, helping to guide the Assault weapons ban through that chamber in 1994 and even publicly criticizing his party for their relationship with the pro-gun rights organization the National Rifle Association, telling a reporter for *The New York Times*, "I hope, in my lifetime, the marriage between the NRA and my party ends in divorce...It's a bad marriage" (Bruni and Dao 1999, 1). In 2005, Shays was one of only three House Republicans to oppose a major gun rights bill put forth by the Republican party, making him (unbeknownst at the time) one of the last of a dying breed of pro-control Republicans. In Congress at the same time as Shays but on the opposite side of the aisle was House Democrat Ted Strickland (OH-6th). A rural representative and career anti-controller who referred to gun control as a "hollow promise of false security" (103rd Cong. Rec. H3079 (1994)), Strickland had long received the endorsement of the NRA, who praised him for his "perfect voting record on firearms issues" ('Defend Freedom vote Strickland' campaign mailing, 2010).

Shays and Strickland are symbols of a bygone political era when Congressional voting on gun control did not split cleanly along party lines. Yet even their respective gun control legacies are colored by partisanship, for despite remaining steadfast in their positions

while in Congress, both would shift later in their political careers to align with their respective parties. Three years after leaving Congress, Chris Shays would renounce his decades long support for gun control during his Republican primary campaign for the 2012 Senate race in Connecticut, particularly taking aim at the Assault weapons ban he had once passionately defended. He would tell a reporter that the ban "didn't achieve anything," adding further that "Frankly, I don't think it made a difference...The only reason to vote for it is public perception that you're doing something meaningful" (Blake 2013, 2). Eight years after leaving Congress and during his own Senate primary campaign in 2016, Strickland would similarly reverse his position, expressing support for the enactment of gun control when he had up to that point spent his political career opposing it. In an opinion piece written for the online forum *Medium*, Strickland defended his change in position, writing, "I grew up in rural Appalachia, and I believe in the Second Amendment...My creator also gave me eyes and ears, a heart and brain-and the capacity to use all of them to assess the challenges facing our country. There is no denying that America is facing a pressing and heartbreaking epidemic of gun violence" (Hohmann 2016, 1).

It could be the case that Shays and Strickland had genuine changes of heart on the gun control issue- Shays coming to believe that the Assault weapons ban he had supported for decades was truly ineffective at reducing gun violence, Strickland moved by the growing epidemic of mass shootings to reconsider his former anti-control stance. Yet given the increasingly partisan political dynamics in Congress, what is more plausible is that both shifted positions to adapt and remain competitive within their respective parties- the electoral pressures and incentives which once led them to cross the party line replaced by new ones which motivated them to align with it.

Asymmetric party shifts: Conclusions

This thesis seeks to demonstrate that the state of hyper partisanship on gun control evident in Congress today is not simply the passive or inevitable byproduct of growing ideological polarization and the replacement of political moderates over time, nor is it an outcome that can be sufficiently explained in the context of the existing polarization literature. Rather, it is the culmination of a complex combination of factors which will be unpacked and analyzed in the following chapters, the most significant of which has been the changing electoral pressures and incentives of opposition group members over time. And

while it is in many regards its own unique polarization story, gun control polarization remains a critical part of the general story of increasing partisan polarization at the Congressional level. Thus the thesis will ultimately contribute both case specific and broader findings to the polarization literature.

Key terms

This section will define key terms and concepts relevant for the thesis, reference to which will be made throughout.

Gun control: Gun control legislation refers to legislation that aims to regulate the manufacture, sale, or possession of firearms by civilians. A member of Congress described in the thesis as a pro-controller is a member who has consistently (if not every time) voted for gun control during their time in Congress. A member described as a gun control moderate is a member who has voted for some, but not all, forms of gun control; for example, an individual who voted for the Brady bill but not the Assault weapons ban would be considered a gun control moderate. An anti-controller is a member who has consistently (if not every time) opposed gun control.

Gun rights: Gun rights legislation refers to legislation that aims to weaken or repeal existing gun control regulations or which makes it easier for civilians to access, possess, or carry firearms. Over the timeframe that the thesis covers, pro-controllers have typically opposed gun rights legislation and anti-controllers have supported it (while gun control moderates have both opposed and supported) although as will be demonstrated, there has been more variability in gun rights voting compared to gun control voting.

Measure of polarization: The measure of polarization for a roll call vote is found by determining the percentage of the members of each party who voted yes, converting each percentage into a proportion (i.e. 36 percent/100= .36) and subtracting the smaller proportion from the larger proportion. Since during the timeframe being studied Democrats have consistently supported gun controls more than Republicans, for gun control votes, the measure of polarization is the proportion of Democrats in favor minus the proportion of Republicans in favor, while the inverse is the case for gun rights votes. For the purposes of this thesis, Independents are not factored into the measure of polarization. On a scale of 0 to

1, a measure of 0 is not polarized at all, while a measure of 1 is completely polarized along party lines.

Minority opposition group: In this thesis, the term minority opposition group refers to the collective individuals within each party who cross the party line on gun control/gun rights votes. Since they are not organized for the purpose of supporting or opposing gun control, they are referred to as groups rather than caucuses or coalitions. To qualify as a group rather than a handful of individuals, parameters have been set- a minority opposition group must constitute a minimum of 15 percent of party members in the House and a minimum of 10 percent in the Senate.

Electoral pressures/incentives: In this thesis, the term 'electoral' is defined as being related to elections. Thus electoral pressures or incentives refer to pressures and incentives which impact or which members of Congress perceive to be impacting their reelection prospects. While there are many factors which influence Congressional behavior (including deeply held personal beliefs, the desire to achieve influence within their chamber, or the desire to enact good public policy)(Fenno 1973), this thesis is built upon Mayhew's (1974) contention that the proximate goal of members of Congress is reelection, which they must continuously achieve before any of their other goals can be met. Overall, the thesis's analysis relies upon the argument that electoral concerns (concerns relating to one's reelection prospects) are the primary factor influencing the voting of most Congressional members in regard to gun control.

'Near complete' polarization: Throughout the thesis, the phrase 'near complete' (or sometimes referred to as 'hyper polarization') refers to the final outcome being analyzed. Why is this a study of 'near complete' rather than 'complete' polarization? As will be demonstrated, while by the 115th Congress (2017-2018) the minority opposition groups within each party had dissolved, there remains what appears to be a not fully reducible minimum of opposition (if only a handful of members) within each party. This holds for voting on other highly partisan issues (such as healthcare), where there tends to be at least a few members crossing party lines. This speaks to the inherent complexity of the electoral calculations of members of Congress generally; with 100 Senators and 435 House members, even in the current hyper partisan political environment the odds are high that there will be

some representatives whose political circumstances and electoral incentives differ from the majority of their partisan colleagues. As a result, the 'near complete' polarization on gun control present in Congress today which this thesis seeks to understand and explain plausibly reflects the limits of partisan polarization on an issue which can be achieved.

Part II: Methods of Research

This thesis will comprise a series of case studies- of the Democratic and Republican parties and their unique polarization trajectories, of party leaders whose agenda setting decisions critically influenced the timing of their party's shifts, and of individual members of Congress whose shifting positions on gun control crucially contributed to increasing partisan polarization on the issue. The following sections will set up the remainder of the thesis by unpacking and explaining the methods of research behind this study of Congressional gun control polarization. It will begin by addressing a key methodological choice of scope: Why start with the 103rd Congress? Next will be a list and description of the specific source material used in the thesis (and where relevant, a discussion of specific methods applied using that source material), followed by a discussion of the general qualitative methodological approaches and how they utilize the source material to construct the thesis's case studies. This methods section will conclude with an outline of the thesis chapters.

Scope of study

The first methodological question worth addressing is why this case study of Congressional gun control polarization begins with the 103rd Congress (1993-1994). From a research design perspective, a study beginning with the earliest gun control legislation to be passed by Congress (the National Firearms Act of 1934) appears ideal. Yet fully covering the 83-year period in which Congress has been debating and voting on gun control was not feasible due to word limit constraints; attempting to do so would invariably result in a thesis that was more narrative than analytical. Thus the 103rd Congress (1993-1994) was chosen as the starting point for analysis.

This starting point was chosen for three reasons. First, it made logical sense to begin a study of partisan polarization on gun control after the parties had established divergent platform positions on the issue (which they did beginning in 1968), as comparing party

polarization levels before and after this critical juncture would be misleading. Second, as will be discussed in the Literature review chapter, the formation of two ideologically distinct parties (precipitated by a process referred to as party realignment) provides a sufficient explanation for the shift from relatively non-existent to moderate levels of polarization on the issue up to the 103rd Congress, but cannot account for the shift from moderate levels to near complete polarization on the issue by the 115th Congress (2017-2018). Third, the 103rd Congress offered a compelling starting point for analysis because it was noteworthy for passing landmark federal gun control with bipartisan support, leading gun control advocates and political pundits at the time to predict that a new era of bipartisan cooperation and gun control enactment was imminent (it would not be). Why was this particular Congress able to pass the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban with bipartisan support? And what changed over time so that more than twenty years later, the Congressional gun control debate is characterized not by continued bipartisanship and the passage of additional gun controls, but by policy stagnation and hyper polarization on the issue? By tailoring the case study to address these questions, the parameters of the thesis (the 103rd Congress (1993-1994) to the 115th Congress (2017-2018)) were set.

Source material and relevant methods

The thesis has drawn upon a variety of sources to construct its case study of Congressional gun control polarization- sources (and where applicable, specific methods applied using these sources) which are listed and described below.

The Congressional Record: The Congressional Record is the official published account of debates, activities, and proceedings of the United States Congress, making it a valuable primary source for statements of public record made by members. In particular, the thesis has utilized the record (which is transcribed verbatim) of floor debates in the House and Senate in consideration of specific gun control and gun rights legislation, as well as the recorded roll call votes taken on said legislation.

Method: Debate rhetoric analysis

At various points throughout the thesis, the rhetoric of Congressional gun control debates has been analyzed using the aforementioned transcripts of floor debates available through the Congressional Record. For these debates, I have identified the rhetorical themes

and arguments in support of/opposition to gun control which were most frequently used, over time tracking their evolution. From a methodological standpoint, Congressional debate rhetoric must be analyzed and interpreted with caution. For example, while it may be the case that Republicans during the 103rd Congress who contended they were supporting gun control to protect police officers in the line of duty were being sincere, there is no way to empirically validate the veracity of their statements. Yet while their statements on the record cannot be used as evidence of their actual beliefs and motivations, the empirical value of Congressional debate rhetoric lies in the choices of issue framing. For critically, identifying what specific arguments were made and rhetorical themes employed in a given period helps to illuminate what factors relevant to the gun control debate members of Congress perceived to be most electorally salient. While one cannot determine whether a member was truly motivated by concerns about protecting police officers to support gun control, one can draw conclusions from their choice of rhetoric that appearing to support police in the fight against crime was important to them. As will be demonstrated, Congressional debate rhetoric centered around gun control's relationship to crime control when crime was a priority political issue for the public in the 1990s, while the focus of the debate would significantly change in later decades to revolve around the mass shooting epidemic.

Overall, the thesis's rhetorical analysis will illustrate both how the focus of the debate has shifted over time (a shift which has had critical implications for polarization), and how the debates themselves have become increasingly partisan, with fewer and fewer members crossing party lines to publicly express support for or opposition to gun control on the House and Senate floor.

News media: Various news media sources have been utilized which provide details and analysis of key events discussed in the thesis (in particular related to gun control and gun rights debates and Congressional votes). Such accounts are empirically valuable not only for reporting on the events, but also as a source of contemporaneous observations and commentary on the events/issues as they unfolded. News media is also a critical source for public statements, speeches, and interviews given by presidents, party leaders, and members of Congress related to the gun issue. Sources will include the weekly publication *Congressional Quarterly* magazine, which reports on the weekly proceedings of Congress, as well as newspapers such as *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Chicago Tribune,* and *The Los Angeles Times,* and television news media including NBC and CNN.

Secondary sources (academic books and journal articles, memoirs, reference books): Academic works published on various topics including partisan polarization, Congress, the Democratic and Republican parties, and gun control politics are a valuable source for understanding the scholarly thinking on these topics. Such works have been utilized in reviews of the academic literature relevant for the thesis and in support of specific arguments being made throughout. Additionally, a few memoirs written by both presidents and former members of Congress have been used, as well as reference books such as the *Congressional districts: A portrait of America* series.

Interest group ratings: Interest group ratings have been used as a means to corroborate other data (such as the voting record and public statements and interviews) in order to determine a member of Congress's position on the gun issue. Ratings from the pro-gun/anti-control organization the National Rifle Association have been the main source used, as this organization has been the most consistent of the gun issue organizations in releasing yearly ratings of Congressional members over the timeframe of this study.

The NRA rating system is as follows: An A+ rating is given to an individual/candidate/legislator with a pro-gun voting record "who has also made a vigorous effort to promote and defend the Second Amendment." An A rating is given to "a solidly pro-gun candidate," a B rating to a "generally pro-gun candidate," a C rating to a "candidate with a mixed record," a D rating to "an anti-gun candidate who usually supports restrictive gun control legislation," and an F rating to "a true enemy of gun owner's rights. A consistent anti-gun candidate" (NRA Political Victory Fund, NRA-PVF.org). These ratings are particularly useful for tracking position changes (for example a member of Congress who had a B rating from the National Rifle Association in 1994 and a D rating in 2016 clearly adopted a more pro-control voting record over time).

Additionally, ratings from ideological groups (the American Conservative Union for conservatives and Americans for Democratic Action for liberals) have been used to corroborate DW-nominate scores when discussing the ideological affiliation of a specific member of Congress. These ratings are assigned on a percentage scale from 0 to 100, with a higher score indicating a more conservative (for the ACU) or more liberal (for ADA) voting record.

DW-nominate scores: In their seminal study *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll-Call Voting (*1997*)*, Poole and Rosenthal developed a system called DW-nominate to track Congressional change over time. The thesis has utilized DW-nominate scores to categorize members of Congress and compare Congresses and roll call voting over time.

Method: DW-nominate analysis

First dimension DW-nominate scores are numerical values assigned to each member of Congress on a scale of -1 (liberal) to 1[5] (conservative) based on an amalgamation of their individual roll call votes for a given Congress. While the thesis has primarily utilized this first, most robust dimension of DW-nominate, there is a second dimension which has also been applied at various points in the thesis. While the first dimension situates members on a liberal-conservative scale, the second, cross cutting dimension "picks up divisions within the parties," predominantly involving issues of race (Poole and Rosenthal, 2007, 42). According to these authors, the second dimension was most significant during two historical periods when the race issue was central to American politics- first during the debate over slavery in the 1830s, and later during the Civil Rights debates of the 1940s through the 1960s (4). And while it was primarily conceived as a racial dimension, this second dimension is also useful at picking up inter-party divides on issues (namely gun control) where regional considerations come into play. With this second dimension, having a score closer to -1 indicates weaker and a score closer to 1 indicates stronger racial conservatism or regional influence in roll call voting. In terms of gun control voting specifically, this dimension is useful for identifying divides within the Democratic party (the Republican party less so- for reasons discussed in Chapter Four), despite the fact that the authors have concluded that the importance of this second dimension "is in free fall" (315) because over time "nearly everything becomes a straight liberal/conservative issue" that can be explained using the first dimension.

Why was DW-nominate used in the thesis? Seeking a quantifiable way to categorize members of Congress as either liberal, moderate, or conservative, this system was the best source available. While interest group ratings of Congressional members provide a useful means for corroborating DW-nominate scores, on their own they are too general to be useful in a quantifiable way. Thus throughout the thesis, each Congress has been divided into three

[5] While rare, there have been members of Congress with DW-nominate scores above 1, such as libertarian Ron Paul (TX-14th), whose score during the 109th Congress (2005-2006) was 1.154. There have not been members of Congress with a score below -1.

terciles (liberal/moderate/conservative) using the first dimension DW-nominate scores of its members, each tercile containing one third of the members of that Congress. For the purposes of this study, a member is counted as liberal if they fell within the first tercile of that Congress; likewise, if they fell within the third tercile they are counted as a conservative. In instances where specific individuals are discussed in the thesis, interest group ratings have been used as a second measure to corroborate their classification- as even within a tercile, there can be a broad range of DW-nominate scores.

For example, during the 103rd Congress Republican Senator Bob Smith (NH) had a first dimension DW-nominate score of .774, making him the fifth "most conservative" member of that Congress. This score is significantly higher than that of Republican Senator Strom Thurmond (SC), who had a score of .386. Yet both Senators fell within the third (conservative) tercile of that Congress, and both identified as, and according to American Conservative Union (ACU) ratings would be categorized as, conservatives (Smith having a rating of 100 out of 100 and Thurmond 91 out of 100 from the ACU). Similarly, House Democrats Nancy Pelosi (CA-8th) and John Conyers (MI-14th) both fell within the first (liberal) tercile of the 103rd Congress, yet Conyers had a lower score (-.626 -the fourth 'most liberal' score of that Congress) than Pelosi (-.509). Yet according to the liberal group Americans for Democratic Action, both received favorable ratings for their liberal voting records during that Congress (each with a rating of 95 out of 100).

Why was each Congress divided into three terciles rather than choosing a cut off mark (i.e. everyone with a DW-nominate score below -.200 be counted as a liberal and everyone above .200 be counted as a conservative)? Because the parties were already significantly ideologically polarized by this point, doing so would not be the most accurate way to categorize members. For example, consider an individual like Wayne Gilchrest (R:MD-1st), who was known throughout his career to be a moderate Republican. If a cut off of .200 was chosen, Gilchrest's DW-nominate score of .268 would categorize him as a conservative, which would be inaccurate. The same would occur for moderate Democrat Earl Pomeroy (ND-at large), whose score of -.268 would inaccurately classify him as a liberal. Additionally, (and perhaps most importantly) choosing a cut off mark doesn't account for Congressional change over time- for example, what constituted a conservative DW-nominate score during the 103rd Congress (1993-1994) would be moderate by the standards of the 115th (2017-2018). Overall, using terciles for each Congress provided for the most accurate

categorization, as members are classified in relation to their peers during a particular Congress.

Limitations of DW-nominate

It must be noted that using DW-nominate to categorize members of Congress is not a foolproof method. For example, because members' DW-nominate scores can be very close together (and in some cases, two members can share an exact score), when dividing each Congress into terciles, it is hypothetically possible that a member with a score of .400 could end up being categorized as a moderate (being the last member of the middle tercile), while a member with a score of .401 could be categorized as a conservative (being the first member in the third tercile). Additionally, growing ideological polarization in Congress can complicate the categorization system, as fewer political moderates remaining over time (particularly in the Republican party) means that some conservatives on the moderate end of the DW-nominate range may end up in the moderate tercile of that Congress even if they identify as conservative/would be viewed by ideological interest groups as conservative. Yet ultimately, despite these limitations and the potential inaccuracies they might engender, I have determined that using DW-nominate scores and dividing Congresses into terciles was the most empirically robust method available to differentiate and categorize members of Congress for the purposes of this thesis.

Polling data: Public opinion polling on crime, gun control, and gun rights from national polling organizations (primarily the Pew Research Center and the Gallup Organization) as well as additional polling from news media organizations (such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, ABC News, and CNN) have been used throughout the thesis to track trends and significant changes in public opinion on these topics over time.

In terms of the latter group, it is worth noting that some scholars question the reliability of gun control polling from media organizations, contending that these polls are often slanted in favor of support for gun control (Mauser and Kopel 1992). That media polling suffers from greater accuracy and reliability problems than polling from national organizations like Pew and Gallup has been documented (Mann and Orren 1992, Spitzer 2012). However, these limitations extend to polling on all subjects and are not specific to gun control. In response to these authors, Spitzer (2012) argues that they "fail to take into account

the broad range of such (gun control media) polling, which finds general concurrence with what is known about public sentiment on the major features of the gun issue" (Spitzer, 2012, 223). In this debate I concur with Spitzer. While as a less reliable form of polling individual results should be interpreted with caution, by considering the bulk of gun control media polling alongside that from national survey research organizations such as Gallup and Pew, general trends in public opinion on gun control can be gleaned which, while imperfect, are nonetheless empirically valuable.

Publicly available data: Data provided by various government agencies have been utilized throughout the thesis for a number of purposes, including to track crime statistics over time, (The Federal Bureau of Investigation and Bureau of Justice) determine the outcomes of Congressional and presidential elections at the primary and general levels, (Federal Election Commission), and to categorize Congressional districts in the House (U.S Census Bureau).

Method: Congressional district categorization

Throughout the thesis, members of the House of representatives have been classified as representing one of three types of Congressional districts: urban, mixed/suburban, or rural. In order to accomplish this, information has been collated from two sources: The United States Census Bureau's 'Congressional Districts by Urban/Rural Population and Land Area' data files (available for each Congress) and *Congressional Quarterly's* '*Congressional Districts in the 1990's: A portrait of America'* and '*Congressional Districts in the 2000's: A portrait of America'* reference books.

For each Congressional district, the U.S. Census Bureau provides the percentage of the population of that district that resides within the Census Bureau's classification of 'Urbanized areas' and what percentage reside in 'rural areas.' They define urbanized areas as "densely developed territory encompassing residential, commercial, and other non-residential urban land uses," which "consists of areas of high population density and urban land use resulting in a representation of the 'urban footprint.'" They define rural areas as "all territory, population, and housing units located outside urban areas" (U.S Census Bureau, Census.gov). Using this information, I was able to classify each Congressional district as either urban or rural.

But while identifying rural districts is a relatively uncomplicated task (as any district with the majority of its population residing in rural areas is classified as rural) the all-encompassing 'urban area' classification necessitated some unpacking. While some urban districts can be easily identified and classified as such (such as New York's 14th Congressional district- where 100 percent of the population resides in 'urban areas,' and which, according to *Congressional Districts: A Portrait of America* covers the East side of Manhattan and parts of Queens and Brooklyn)(517), many districts contain a mix of urban, suburban, and rural elements and classifying them as strictly 'urban' would be inaccurate. Because of this, a third classification (mixed/suburban) was developed for the thesis to account for these types of districts.

Determining which districts would be classified as urban and which as mixed/suburban was a two-part process. First, a distinction needed to be made between the two district types that was quantifiable. A percentage mark of 85 percent (of members of that district residing within urban areas) was chosen as a benchmark; for a district to be classified as urban, it first needed to meet this 85 percent threshold. Any districts that fell below that mark (but were not majority rural) would be considered mixed/suburban. Yet establishing a quantifiable barrier was not an infallible method of identification- for example, some districts that were above 85 percent urban (meaning very little of the population resided in rural areas) were in fact predominantly suburban in character. So a second method of identification was used- Congressional Quarterly's *Congressional Districts: A Portrait of America* reference books, which for each district provide a detailed description and a wide range of individual characteristics of that particular district, including a determination as to whether the district is predominantly urban, suburban, or rural in character or whether it has mixed elements of the various types.

This second step was used to either corroborate or dispute the classifications made using the 85 percent cut off mark. For example, when classifying districts for the 103rd Congress, Illinois's 6th Congressional district, which was identified by the Census Bureau as being 100 percent urban, passed step one in the urban identification process, but failed in the second, as it was characterized in *A Portrait of America* as "Northwest and West Chicago suburbs" with the description "to the south are long established suburbs...to the North are suburbs that boomed in the 1960s... and in between are newer suburbs that have seen much of

the area's recent population growth" (242). So despite meeting the initial 85 percent burden for urban districts, Illinois's 6th was ultimately classified in the thesis as mixed/suburban.

Another example from the 103rd Congress is Arizona's 3rd Congressional district. With 81.5 percent of its residents residing in urban areas (and 18.5 percent in rural), this district failed to meet the minimum standard for urban districts and was in step one classified as mixed/suburban. When cross referenced with its detailed description in *A Portrait of America*, which referred to the district as primarily consisting of "suburbs west of Phoenix," (40) its classification as mixed/suburban from step one was corroborated. As a final example, with 65 percent of its residents residing in rural areas and 34 percent in urban areas, Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional district was classified as rural in step one; *A Portrait of America* confirmed this, calling the district "primarily rural...it relies on farming and livestock to fuel its economy" (608).

Table 1: Two-step process for classifying Congressional districts in the House

District type	Step 1: Initial classification	Step 2: Corroboration
urban	At least 85 percent of residents in that district residing in urban areas	*Congressional districts: A Portrait of America.* Is the district described as primarily urban in character?
mixed/suburban	Below 85 percent threshold for urban but greater than a rural majority	*Congressional districts: A Portrait of America.* Is the district mixed in character? Is it primarily suburban?
rural	A majority of district residents residing in rural areas	*Congressional districts: A Portrait of America.* Is the district described as being primarily rural in character?

Sources: U.S Census Bureau, *Congressional districts: A Portrait of America* (Congressional Quarterly)

Table 2: Additional examples testing two-step method

District	Step 1: Initial classification	Step 2: Corroboration	Final classification
Illinois 7th	100% urban (urban)	"Chicago-downtown; west side...The black majority 7th links Chicago's bustling downtown business district with the city's poorest minority neighborhoods" (244).	urban
Wisconsin 2nd	64% urban 34% rural (mixed/suburban)	"The city of Madison has long been Wisconsin's liberal centerpiece...beyond the city limits, rapidly growing Dane County suburbs strike a more conservative tone...the district also covers a sizable portion of southern Wisconsin's Republican voting rural areas" (807).	mixed/suburban
Louisiana 6th	55% urban 45% rural (mixed/suburban)	"The kite shaped 6th is an economic microcosm...taking in both an urban center and rural agricultural country. But politically speaking, it is lopsidedly conservative. Comprises downtown Baton Rouge, but sprawl across 17 predominantly rural parishes" (326)	mixed/suburban

Sources: U.S Census Bureau, *Congressional districts: A Portrait of America* (Congressional Quarterly).

Limitations

As with the use of DW-nominate, this two-step method of Congressional district categorization is not without limitations. This is both because the sheer number of districts to classify (435) increases the odds of error, and because the cut off percentage marks chosen may lead districts close to them to be misclassified. However, developing and applying this two-step process to create a third district type category provides for a significantly more accurate classification of Congressional districts in the House than relying on the U.S. Census Bureau's urban or rural classifications alone. As will be demonstrated throughout the thesis, district type is a key variable relevant for understanding Congressional voting on gun control.

Source material not included: Elite interviews

One source not included as part of the thesis was the use of elite interviews. Conducting interviews was part of the initial research design, and an attempt was made to contact and pursue interviews with current and former members of Congress, the Congressional leadership, and their staff, including Chiefs of Staff, Deputy Chiefs of Staff, and policy advisors. The majority did not respond to multiple interview requests sent through email or LinkedIn, while several responded directly that they were not interested in being interviewed for the thesis. I managed to secure commitments to interview with two former Chiefs of Staff- one for former House Majority leader Tom DeLay and the other for former Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert. However, by the time the thesis research and case study construction were well under way, both individuals decided to withdraw their participation. As a result, this case study of Congressional gun control polarization has not relied upon the use of elite interviews.

Not having conducted interviews with relevant political actors is a limitation of this study, as lacking insider access to the parties means there could be important facts relevant to the party shifts that are unknown to the researcher. Yet as will become clear, interviews are not necessary for understanding Congressional gun control polarization. The shift towards hyper partisan polarization in the decades since the 103rd Congress is fundamentally about the dissolution of opposition groups within each party; by identifying the key variables influencing opposition group member voting on gun control and determining how these variables changed over time, one can form valid conclusions about this changing group behavior without having to rely on interviews with individual group members. Similarly,

while insight into the agenda setting decisions of party leaders from these leaders themselves would have been empirically valuable, by developing an understanding of their individual personalities and leadership styles and identifying the political, electoral, and institutional constraints and opportunities they faced at a given time, credible inferences can be drawn to analyze and interpret their agenda setting choices. Overall, while interviews would undoubtedly have made a positive contribution to the thesis, I contend that I have utilized a multitude of available resources to construct an empirically strong case study without them.

Qualitative methodological approaches: Process tracing and analytic narratives

Process tracing

This thesis has applied the 'explaining outcome' variant of process tracing (Beach and Pedersen 2013), which aims to "trace the complex conglomerate of systematic and case specific causal mechanisms" (18) which produced the particular outcome being studied. Explaining outcome process tracing is used when the researcher seeks to identify and isolate the causes of a specific outcome (near complete partisan polarization on gun control) in a single case (Congress from the 103rd (1993-1994) to the 115th (2017-2018)).

Understanding how the parties came to be hyper polarized on the gun issue in the present necessitates tracking change over time. Process tracing involves isolating specific variables that influenced outcomes at the starting point of analysis (in this case the 103rd Congress) and determining which variables changed (or didn't change), in doing so drawing conclusions as to what key changes culminated in the outcome being studied. The following chapters will track and analyze numerous changing variables, including related to control of Congress (which party had majority control of what chamber, and who was the president in power), composition of Congress/the parties (what types of party members were leaving Congress and who was replacing them), and the political circumstances of individual members who shifted positions (did the composition of their constituencies change? Were their seats becoming more competitive? Were primary challenges becoming an electoral concern?).

The primary goal of process tracing is to develop a minimally sufficient explanation of the particular outcome being studied, with sufficiency defined as "an explanation that

accounts for all of the important aspects of an outcome with no redundant parts being present" (18). This "minimally sufficient" standard reflects a limitation inherent in process tracing, as regardless of how thoroughly and systematically variables impacting the case are identified and analyzed, there is invariably a possibility that some relevant variable has been missed. Nonetheless, for the purposes of what this case study seeks to accomplish (identifying the causes of a specific outcome- hyper polarization on gun control) process tracing is (along with the construction of analytic narratives) the most empirically valuable qualitative method available.

Analytic narratives

The thesis has also constructed what Bates et al. (1998) have coined 'analytic narratives' in order to explain the party shifts. The historical narrative method "produces understanding via richness, texture, and detail" (McDonald, 1996, 10) while also seeking to "evaluate explanations through a process of valid causal inference" (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 4). Analytic narratives take the historical narrative approach a step further by incorporating elements of rational choice theory; an analytic narrative is not a chronological explanation of how political events unfolded but an analysis of the behavior of political actors and how the sum of their individual choices contributed to the final outcome being studied. As Bates et al. (1998) write of their process, "We wish to examine the choices of individuals who are embedded in specific settings. We wish to trace the sequences of actions, decisions, and responses that generate events and outcomes" (9).

At its core, this study of gun control polarization is fundamentally about the behavior of Congressional political actors. The analytic narrative method has been applied throughout the thesis to interpret this behavior and demonstrate how the summation of the choices of individual political actors contributed to the outcome of hyper polarization on gun control. For example, the thesis has utilized the source material listed beginning on page 12 to construct analytic narratives of the role that each party's leadership played in precipitating their respective shifts. As will be demonstrated in later chapters, the agenda setting choices of party leaders are a critical component of this polarization story. For example, the Congressional Republican leadership's decision to begin pursuing gun rights in the mid-2000s led to the party uniting on the issue a decade before Democrats, while the Democratic leadership's decision to abandon the issue in the early 2000s and reclaim it as a legislative

priority in 2012 influenced the waxing and waning of the party's anti-control minority opposition group over this timeframe.

These analytic narratives will unpack and explain the political, electoral, and institutional constraints and opportunities that these party leaders faced at a given time, their personalities/leadership styles and legislative goals (both as individuals and arms of their party's majority), and their agenda setting choices (including what specific legislation was pursued and when, and how it was pursued-i.e. what procedural tactics and maneuvers were chosen). Working to identify and understand "the decision points they faced, the choices they made, the paths taken or shunned; their preferences, perceptions, expectations, strategies, and constraints" (Bates et al 1998, 11, 14) was critical for the thesis's development of an empirically sound explanation of Congressional leadership behavior- behavior which critically impacted the timing of the party shifts.

Beyond the role of party leadership, the voting behavior of individual members of Congress is key to understanding changes in voting patterns and increasing polarization on the gun control issue. The thesis has also constructed analytic narratives explaining the dissolution of each party's minority opposition group, which includes narratives discussing individual members who shifted positions on the issue. These narratives will analyze the constraints and opportunities of opposition group members through the lens of the electoral pressures and incentives they faced in relation to the gun issue, tracking how these pressures and incentives changed over time- in doing so drawing conclusions about the key variable changes impacting the party shifts. For while every member of Congress has unique political and electoral concerns, there are shared circumstances which critically shed light on group voting behavior.

The analytic narrative method combines an historical narrative approach that pays attention to detail and context with an analytic one that seeks to explain the behavior of political actors. As with any method, there are limitations to this approach; one of the main criticisms of analytic narratives is that their highly detailed and specific focus on a particular individual/group/case makes the capacity to draw broader, generalizable conclusions for a particular literature difficult. Yet this is a limitation inherent in all qualitative case study research, and a limitation that can be transcended- as this thesis will contribute both case specific and broader findings to the polarization literature. The utility of the analytic narrative

approach is perhaps best summed up by Smith (1996), who states, “If the body of work built up by political science ended up stressing the contingent choices of political actors more than any other factor, and therefore resembled some narrative types of history, that would represent not a surrender but a culmination of the methods of social science” (148).

Vote selection and comparison

Vote selection

Over the timeframe that this thesis covers, numerous gun control and gun rights votes were held in Congress, both on stand-alone legislation and amendments to omnibus bills (both gun control bills and non). The multitude of such votes necessitated that a focus for analysis be chosen. As a study of increasing partisan polarization, this thesis seeks to explain significant changes in party voting patterns over time. With this goal in mind, what would be the best types of votes to demonstrate this change? Ideally, votes which can be compared over time (the same legislation and in the same chamber). For example, two House votes held on legislation to repeal Washington, D.C.’s handgun ban in 1999 and 2004 will be analyzed in Chapter Six to illustrate how party voting on gun rights changed over this five-year period. Similarly, votes on an Assault weapons ban in the Senate in 1994 and 2013 will be compared. Additionally, while not directly comparable to other votes, stand-alone votes where party voting patterns or polarization levels were indicative of significant change on the gun issue are also empirically valuable. For example, a 2005 vote on landmark gun rights legislation which demonstrated both a significant Republican shift from previous gun rights votes and stark partisan differences in voting will be analyzed in Chapter Six.

Limitations of roll call vote analysis

There are limitations inherent in the thesis’s roll call voting analysis which should be addressed. In an ideal research scenario, there would be multiple roll call votes over time on the same legislation in both chambers of Congress that would allow for direct comparison. Yet the gun control/gun rights voting over the timeframe of this study has not fit such a neat pattern. Due to the complexities of the legislative process and sometimes unpredictable nature of Congressional agenda setting, direct and straightforward comparisons cannot be made in every instance. Some votes that will be analyzed were gun control votes and others gun rights votes. Some votes occurred only in the House and some only in the Senate; the

most recent gun control votes (in 2013 and 2016) are Senate votes only, while the most recent House votes in 2018 were gun rights votes. For some types of legislation (such as background checks) there are variations from bill to bill, while some gun rights debates appear to be entwined with other issues (for example whether or not Congress has jurisdiction over lawmaking in Washington, D.C. to pass a repeal of the city's handgun ban).

As the most empirically valuable option, directly comparable votes like the examples given above have been analyzed whenever possible in the thesis. However, neither demonstrating nor understanding shifts in partisan voting behavior on the gun issue necessitate that all the votes analyzed be directly comparable. By taking into account the body of roll call voting and identifying and analyzing general trends in gun voting over time, it will become clear that most Democrats have come to support most gun controls and oppose most gun rights legislation, while for Republicans it has been the opposite. For critically, as the parties have become increasingly polarized on the gun issue over time, legislative specifics have come to matter less than the general gun control versus gun rights partisan divide as a way of understanding gun issue voting. Today, a gun vote serves as a signaling device from members of Congress to their partisan supporters that they are either passionate defenders of the Second Amendment (Republicans) or fierce protectors of America's children from gun violence (Democrats). While all of the gun control/gun rights bills considered by Congress over the last few years have been substantively different to one other, they share a commonality in that they have all been nearly fully polarized along party lines, with no major differences in voting patterns to suggest that the policies themselves more than the general gun control/gun rights partisan cleavage is the decisive factor at play.

Ultimately, using a combination of directly comparable votes and significant stand-alone votes in both chambers, the thesis will demonstrate how general trends in partisan gun issue voting have critically changed over time, culminating in a state of hyper polarization on the gun issue by the 115th Congress. For reference purposes, a specific breakdown and explanation of the key gun control and gun rights legislation that was analyzed in the thesis, as well as a chart indicating which votes are directly comparable over time, can be found in the appendix.

Outline of thesis

This study begins with a review of the academic literature relevant to the thesis in *Chapter Two*, followed by a discussion of key variables pertinent for understanding Congressional gun control voting at the starting point of analysis (the 103rd Congress of 1993-1994) in *Chapter Three*. *Chapter Four* will comprise an analysis of the gun control votes of the 103rd Congress, identifying various trends and divides in party voting and demonstrating how the variables discussed in *Chapter Three* superseded both partisanship and political ideology in influencing the gun control voting of certain members. *Chapter Five* will discuss the Republican Revolution of 1994 and assess its implications for gun control polarization, before moving on to an analysis of the remainder of the decade and specifically the post Columbine gun control debates of May/June 1999. The chapter's analysis of these debates will demonstrate that there was both continuing bipartisan support and opposition to gun control, as the critical forces for change that would bring about the dissolution of opposition groups within each party were not yet in motion by the end of the decade.

Chapter Six will mark the first critical turning point in the shift towards hyper polarization on gun control- the Republican shift in favor of gun rights. It will demonstrate that the Congressional Republican leadership took advantage of an open window of political opportunity to begin agenda setting on gun rights, and as the political context changed and old electoral pressures and incentives were replaced with new ones, the party's pro-control minority opposition group dissolved as the majority of its remaining members shifted to vote the party line. Meanwhile, Democratic party leaders, determining that gun control was no longer a winning issue for the party, would encourage electorally vulnerable members to vote their constituencies. As a result, the party's anti-control minority opposition group grew as its Republican counterpart dissolved in the mid-2000s.

Chapter Seven will analyze the Democratic shift, which occurred nearly a decade after that of the Republican party. It will demonstrate that after nearly a decade of avoidance, Democratic leaders reclaimed gun control as a legislative priority after the Sandy Hook shooting in December 2012, and that in the following years, the party's anti-control minority opposition group would dissolve. This occurred in part due to replacement, but also critically as electoral incentives for certain types of Democrats changed, leading most opposition group members to shift and embrace the party's pro-control cause. With the Republican party

having long since united in favor of gun rights (and with no comparable minority opposition group reemerging), the subsequent Democratic shift would lead to the most partisan polarized gun votes in Congressional history and bring about a state of near complete partisan polarization on the issue by the 115th Congress (2017-2018). A *Conclusion* chapter will end the thesis, summarizing its main arguments and themes, discussing its contributions to the wider literature, and offering possibilities for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature review

This chapter aims to situate the thesis's study of Congressional gun control polarization in the context of the relevant academic literature. The thesis has drawn upon various literatures to build a foundation for its arguments, and in turn will contribute to the existing literature with its findings. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the literature on partisan polarization in the United States as relates to Congress specifically. It will place gun control polarization in the context of broader arguments about how partisan polarization initially came about, while explaining the role played by specific political actors cited in the literature as contributors to partisan polarization. Following this, additional literatures relevant to the thesis will be discussed, including that relating to the asymmetric characteristics of the political parties, Congressional leadership and voting behavior, and gun control politics in the United States.

Part I: Partisan polarization and Congress

The roots of partisan polarization: Party realignment

One of the most prolific topics in the polarization literature involves that of political elites (and particularly members of Congress). Hare and Poole (2015) write, "To the extent that any topic in the social sciences can be settled, the polarization of American political elites almost certainly qualifies" (32). Yet elite polarization has not always been a defining characteristic of the American political system. In 1950, the American Political Science Association's now defunct Committee on Political Parties published a report titled "Towards a more responsible two-party system" in which they lamented a lack of distinction between the Democratic and Republican parties, stating that "alternatives between the parties are defined so badly it is often difficult to determine what the election has decided even in broadest terms" and that a system of popular government "requires political parties which provide the electorate with a proper range of choice between alternatives of action" (APSR 1950). This report is noteworthy in the context of today's highly partisan polarized political environment, for its authors could not have predicted the extent to which their calls for the creation of two distinct political parties with divergent policy agendas would come to fruition in the coming decades. But how did the two-party system evolve from that bemoaned by the Committee on Political Parties to the highly polarized system of today?

Numerous scholars have contended that partisan polarization within the U.S party system has its roots in the party realignment (particularly in the South[1]) which occurred from roughly the mid-1960s onwards (although some contend it began as early as the mid-1950s). What was party realignment and why did it occur? One of the most frequently cited theories is that many conservative southern Democrats became disillusioned with the direction in which their party was heading (after its alignment with and acceptance of both the civil rights and anti-war movements) and switched their allegiance to the Republican party (Poole and Rosenthal 1997, Black and Black 2002, Sinclair 2006, Gelman 2009, Levendusky 2009, Abramowitz 2010). As a result, the South would transform from a strongly Democratic region into one that became increasingly Republican, as Democratic party identification amongst voters dropped and conservative southerners in Congress brought the Republican party in line with their ideological positions and issue preferences (Black and Black 2002, Sinclair 2006). As conservative southern Democrats in Congress left the party, it made the Democratic party less ideologically conservative and the Republican party more ideologically conservative; over time, party identification and political ideology became strongly aligned due to sorting, as conservatives came to identify as Republicans and liberals as Democrats (Levendusky 2009).

But while there is a general consensus that it occurred, not everyone agrees with the above interpretation of the cause of party realignment in the South. For example, Valentino and Sears (2005) argue that the South's shift from a Democratic region to a Republican one was driven primarily by racial conservatism rather than the alignment of partisanship with general ideological conservatism as argued by Black and Black (2002) and others. They contend that after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, southern whites "abandoned their previous allegiance to a racially conservative Southern Democratic party in favor of a Republican party newly conservative on racial issues" (Valentino and Sears 2005, 685). Others, like Johnston and Shafer (2006), contend that party realignment in the South began earlier (in the mid-1950s) and was driven by post-World War II economic growth, as a wealthy suburban class emerged who began to vote for the party which best represented their economic interests- the Republican party. Meanwhile, they argued, working class whites in

[1] Additionally, while Southern realignment was the most significant change to occur, also contributing to party realignment over time was a shifting of moderate Republicans in the Northeast, Midwest, and Pacific Coast into the Democratic party (Abramowitz 2010), as well as that of the majority of African-Americans. This latter shift began during the New Deal era of the 1930s and increased after the Democratic party's support for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Bositis 2005, Gelman 2009, Abramowitz 2010).

the South remained loyal to the Democratic party. Polsby (2004) also argues that party realignment began earlier than the mid-1960s, crediting the advent of air conditioning in the 1950s for bringing about a North-to-South migration of wealthy retirees and white collar workers which fostered a large Republican voting base in the region.

More recent work contends that party realignment and the polarization which followed was not solely the byproduct of structural changes such as demographic shifts or technological change, but rather was part of a concerted and successful effort by "ideologically driven thinkers, activists, and politicians in the middle ranks of American politics" to create two distinct political parties (Rosenfeld, 2017, 3). Rosenfeld (2017) argues that liberal and conservative activists viewed partisan polarization as a solution to endemic problems they saw in the American political system, believing that unified political parties with disparate policy agendas would improve policy making and "invigorate Democracy" (4).

In conclusion, while there is a lack of consensus as to the precise cause of party realignment, most scholars generally agree that it initiated a sorting process of conservatives into the Republican party and liberals into the Democratic party which over time fostered partisan polarization by creating "for the first time in nearly sixty years, two sharply distinct political parties" (Poole and Rosenthal 2007, 232).

Beyond party realignment: Political opportunity and majority building

While much of this literature focuses on the specific causes of party realignment, recent work has illuminated how political actors (and particularly Republican presidents) recognized, and sought to take advantage of, the political opportunity for changes in partisan electoral advantage that this period of realignment offered. Mason (2012, 2017) contends that from the New Deal era onwards, and particularly as challenges to liberalism began to take root in the late 1960s, Republican politicians were constantly working to "reposition and to revitalize their party, ever still in search of that prize" (Mason 2017, 3), the prize being majority party status. Electoral politics and how to maximize Republican advantage after the Democratic party's fracturing in the late 1960s/early 1970s was a preoccupation of President Nixon's, the president seeking a way to broaden the electoral impact of the "silent majority" that supported his gradualist policies in Vietnam (5). Years later, Ronald Reagan viewed

building a coalition of economic and social conservatives as the best route to achieving a party majority.

Future Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich believed that emphasizing fundamental differences between the parties would be key to Republican success, noting that "realigning elections are divisive, not appeasing" (Mason 2012, 277). President George W. Bush would later attempt to distance himself and the party from this confrontational approach (which ceased to be effective after the initial breakthrough of the 1994 midterm elections), endorsing "compassionate conservatism" and initiatives on immigration, education, and Medicare which sought to build new coalition support instead. Overall, Mason contends that while Republicans were not always successful at isolating the reasons behind their minority status or developing strategies to effectively overcome it, they nonetheless worked tirelessly in pursuit of a party majority. As will be seen, Republican majority status was critical for the party's pursuit of a gun rights agenda during the 2000s, although their takeover of Congress in 1995 did not immediately translate into such a pursuit (for reasons which will be discussed).

Party realignment and gun control polarization

How does gun control polarization fit with the process of party realignment? Notwithstanding the incomplete alignment of political ideology and gun issue positions discussed in the Introduction, the formation of two ideologically distinct political parties with disparate policy agendas does help to explain the shift from practically non-existent levels of polarization on gun control in the 1960s to moderate levels by the 103rd Congress (1993-1994). Yet with the sorting of liberals into the Democratic party and conservatives into the Republican party having occurred since at least the mid-1960s, by the mid-to-late 1980s, the parties were ideologically distinct and on most policy issues "the party positions were relatively clear" (Levendusky 2009, 28). So while party realignment can help to explain the shift from low to moderate levels of polarization on gun control up to the 103rd Congress, with the major implications of this process for Congressional polarization having settled by this point, party realignment cannot explain how the parties became nearly fully polarized on the issue more than two decades later.

The growth of Republican conservatism: The Reagan era and the Republican Revolution

Several scholars point out that despite the advent of party realignment beginning as early as the mid-1950s, the first noteworthy signs of a widening partisan gap in Congress followed the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980 (Poole and Rosenthal 2007, Tygiel 2004, Sinclair 2006, Levendusky 2009, Grossmann and Hopkins 2016). Reagan's election victory was viewed at the time as the first major triumph of the resurgent right; due to his active courting of Evangelical Christians, the 1980 Republican platform was significantly more socially conservative than the party's platform in 1976 (Tygiel 2004). Reagan's conservative policies on abortion, school prayer, defense spending, tax cuts, and his various domestic spending programs would come to sharply divide Democrats and Republicans in Congress throughout his presidency, leading to a notable rise in partisan polarized roll call voting during this decade (Poole and Rosenthal 2001, Sinclair 2006, Levendusky 2009). As Milkis (1993) writes, "Reagan's firm adherence to conservative principles contributed significantly to the emergence of a new kind of Republican party" which marked "a revitalization of partisan politics" (Milkis, 1993, 3). Additionally, a significant increase in levels of ideological and partisan polarization in Congress would occur in the wake of the 'Republican Revolution' of 1994, a midterm election cycle in which the party (with a significant influx of conservative members) gained 52 seats in the House and eight in the Senate from Democrats, taking control of both Houses of Congress for the first time in nearly forty years (Shafer 1998).

The growth of Republican conservatism and gun control

The growth of Republican conservatism beginning with the Reagan presidency in 1980 has been cited as a critical driving force behind increasing partisan polarization at the Congressional level. And while this growth undoubtedly contributed to the Republican shift in favor of gun rights in the long term (for reasons which will be discussed throughout the thesis), two key events credited with legitimizing and bolstering Republican conservatism (the Reagan presidency and the Republican Revolution of 1994) did not immediately translate into a Republican party united and in assertive pursuit of a gun rights agenda. For example, while the party had established an anti-control platform beginning in 1968 and president Ronald Reagan considered himself a supporter of gun rights, he did not make the issue a key component of his conservative agenda during his presidency (it was reported that

the Reagan administration bluntly informed the NRA that the economy was the top priority and "gun reform would have to wait") (Kopel, 2013, 43), nor did he actively encourage members of his party to embrace the anti-control position as he had done with prayer in schools and the pro-life abortion stance (Tygiel 2004). And notably, after his tenure as president ended, Reagan would even pen op-eds in *The New York Times* urging Congressional support for both the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban (Easton 1994).

And in the wake of the Republican Revolution of 1994, the new Republican majority leadership did not immediately begin pursuit of an agenda to roll back existing gun control regulations or strengthen gun rights, despite having majority control of Congress and the ability to agenda set for the first time in nearly forty years. Why, as representatives of the party of gun rights, were conservative Republicans in leadership roles not taking advantage of their political power to make pursuing such an agenda a political priority in the 1980s and 1990s? This thesis will explain what political and electoral forces kept gun rights from being a political priority for conservatives during this timeframe (and critically, why certain conservatives broke with the majority and supported gun control), and how the nature of the relationship between conservatism and the gun issue has changed in the decades since the 103rd Congress.

Additional drivers of polarization: The electorate and party activists

While party realignment and the growth of Republican conservatism lay the foundation for understanding how partisan polarization in Congress initially came about, other political actors have been cited in the literature as contributing to increasing levels of partisan polarization over time. This includes the electorate and party activists, who, given their relevance for understanding gun control polarization, will be the focus of this section.

The electorate

The polarization literature is divided over the precise role played by the electorate, with a 'chicken or the egg' debate arising: is the electorate responsible for driving partisan polarization, or has it sorted in response to elite polarization? Some scholars contend that polarization in Congress today is a reflection of polarization within the electorate. Abramowitz (2010) argues that the electorate, and specifically its politically engaged segment, has contributed to growing levels of elite polarization because "the behavior of

candidates and elected officials is increasingly constrained by the preferences of their most active and informed supporters" (Abramowitz 2010, 15) who contribute financially to campaigns, volunteer labor, and make up the bulk of voters in both primary and general elections. Miller and Conover (2015) equate the partisan polarized electorate to fans of rival sports teams- citing partisans who hold "the most hostile and uncivil attitudes" (227) as being the most influential, as they are the most likely to participate in elections.

On the opposite side of the debate are scholars who contend that the electorate has not driven elite polarization, but rather has responded to it. Fiorina (2011) argues that the electorate is significantly less polarized than political elites, but that because their choices have become more polarized, it gives the appearance that they are. He writes, "the hatreds and battles of political elites and party activists are not shared by the mass electorate. A polarized political class makes the citizenry appear polarized, but it is largely that- an appearance" (Fiorina 2011, 22). Gelman (2009) similarly contends that while "hard-core partisans" and the wealthy have sorted themselves into the Democratic and Republican camps and have begun to resemble polarized political elites, the general public "does not seem to be narrowing into extremely coherent ideologies" (Gelman 2009, 45). Levendusky (2009) argues that a process of sorting within the electorate has occurred, as partisans, following the cues of political elites, have brought their ideological issue positions in line with their party identification. He contends that while partisan voters will adopt the general issue positions of their party, they will not necessarily adopt the most extreme aspects of it- meaning that "the electorate as a whole is not so much polarized as better sorted" (Levendusky, 2009, 15).

Gun control polarization and the electorate

The precise role played by the electorate in this thesis's polarization story is an important one, and a role which will unfold in subsequent chapters. For now, it is worth noting that in terms of gun control polarization specifically, the thesis is in agreement with the latter group of aforementioned scholars, and will argue that rather than being directly responsible for driving partisan polarization on gun control at the Congressional level, the electorate has sorted in response to the party shifts- partisans bringing their gun control position in line with their party identification.

Party activists

Another political actor frequently cited in the polarization literature are party activists (Aldrich and Rohde 2001, Sinclair 2006, Layman et al 2010, Grossman and Hopkins 2016). Layman et al. (2010) contend that party activists (who are individuals or groups which champion ideologically far left or right of center issue positions) have played a major role in driving partisan polarization across multiple issues (a process which they term 'conflict extension' (326)). They argue that open nomination systems provide a means for such activists to become involved in party politics, and that these activists (who are more likely than average partisans to vote in primary elections) pressure candidates to adopt more ideologically extreme positions than they would otherwise.

Similarly, Grossman and Hopkins (2016) contend that since the late 1990s, party activists have formed conservative groups (such as the Club for Growth, FreedomWorks, and Heritage Action) and have increasingly inserted themselves into Congressional nomination politics by endorsing and funding primary challenges against incumbent Republicans "deemed to be insufficiently devoted to conservative principles" (Grossman and Hopkins 2016, 238). Over time, this has put immense pressure on Republicans to present themselves as "conservatives in good standing" in order to appease primary voters (who tend to support the most conservative candidates) and fend off/survive these primary challenges (Grossman and Hopkins 2016, 237). While party activists exist in each party, there is a general consensus that they are far more prolific and influential in the Republican party, where groups like the Tea Party have thrived and have far outmatched the electoral influence of liberal groups. As Layman et al. (2010) write, "The main force behind partisan conflict extension in recent years has been the sharp growth in the presence of consistently conservative Republican activists" (340).

Gun control polarization and party activists

Overall, the thesis will demonstrate how the growing influence of party activists contributed to the decline of Republican support for gun control over time. Yet as will be seen, it was a role played by conservative party activists generally, not gun rights party activists specifically. For gun rights groups such as the NRA and the more hardline Gun Owners of America have long been involved at the primary (as in primary election) stage of Congressional competition- long before the Republican party shifted in favor of gun rights

and the parties became nearly fully polarized on the gun issue. As will be demonstrated, the changing electoral incentives of opposition group Republicans in relation to the gun issue coincided with the growth of well-funded conservative activist groups, these groups coming to have a significant influence on Republican voting in later decades.

Part II: Asymmetric parties

That the Democratic and Republican parties had unique polarization trajectories when it came to gun control is a key element of the thesis, and an asymmetry supported by the party literature, where scholars have long argued that there are fundamental differences between the parties. The perception that Republicans were orderly, obedient to party leadership, and united under a common policy agenda and that Democrats were undisciplined, fractured, and "ideologically incoherent" (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016, 6) was widespread throughout the twentieth century (Key 1949, Wilson 1962, Mayhew 1966), Polsby and Mayer (1999) noting that "the image of the Democrats as a divided, discordant party- and specifically as a party more internally divided than the Republicans-is firmly established in American political folklore" (219). Actor, newspaper columnist, and social/political commentator Will Rogers perhaps most aptly articulated this sentiment: "I am not a member of any organized party" he said. "I am a Democrat" (Krugman 2007, 1).

Freeman (1986) argued that the parties have distinct attitudes, organizational patterns, and functional styles (a conglomeration of differences culminating in what she termed "party cultures"), ultimately concluding that the parties were "different political organizations that do things in different ways" (352). This argument was reaffirmed by Grossman and Hopkins (2016), who contend that "The Democrats and Republicans are different kinds of parties, exhibiting distinct types of electoral supporters, activists, and institutional networks...This underlying partisan asymmetry has produced distinct Democratic and Republican approaches to debating public issues, campaigning for votes, and pursuing policy change in government" (14). The general consensus is that the main source of this partisan asymmetry can be traced to the disparate nature of the Democratic and Republican parties electoral bases- the Democratic party's a 'big tent' coalition of social groups (including the working class, African-Americans, and social liberals) with sometimes conflicting agenda goals, the Republican party's a base of ideological conservatives with shared agenda goals (Freeman 1986, Polsby and Mayer 1999, Grossman and Hopkins 2016).

Asymmetric parties and gun control polarization

This thesis seeks to contribute to this party literature with a case study of partisan asymmetry as relates to gun control- one which reaffirms existing theories about the disparate nature and fundamental differences between the parties and how these differences impact political outcomes. And critically, beyond simply highlighting partisan differences, the thesis will also discuss commonalities- demonstrating that certain electoral pressures and incentives related to gun control were once shared by members of both parties. Understanding these commonalities and how they changed will provide key insights for both the polarization and party literatures.

Part III: The Congressional literature

As later chapters of the thesis will demonstrate, the agenda setting decisions of the Congressional leadership and the voting behavior of members of Congress are both critical for understanding gun control polarization. Thus the thesis will also draw on the extensive literature on Congressional behavior, which will inform later discussion and analysis of the party shifts on gun control in the decades since the 103rd Congress.

The Congressional leadership

Much has been written about the leadership in Congress and what (if any) power they exert over agenda setting or legislative outcomes. First, it is worth noting that the focus of this scholarship has been House-centric, as the more permissive rules of the Senate[2] provide fewer means for party leaders to exert influence over organizational and legislative outcomes. Nonetheless, this literature is critically important for understanding Congressional leadership behavior in the House. Many scholars contend that the agenda setting power of these leaders is significantly constrained by the will of the chamber majority (Jones 1968, Cooper and Brady 1981, Cox and McCubbins 1993, Sinclair 1999). As agents of this majority, they must work to advance their agenda goals or risk the majority altering rules to reduce their authority or even have them removed from their leadership position. Rohde (1991) and Aldrich and Rohde (1997) argue that the majority leadership are at their most powerful politically when

[2] For example, the supermajority (⅔) requirement needed to cut off debate lends more power to the minority party in the Senate than in the majoritarian House (Sinclair 2006, 225).

their party is unified under a common agenda; they have little political incentive to pursue aims that conflict with those of the party majority.

While most agree that there are institutional constraints which elevate the power of the chamber majority and keep party leaders in check, there is wider latitude amongst scholars as to the degree to which the leadership's power is curbed. Krehbiel (1991) and Sinclair (1999) hold the view that individual party leaders are more or less interchangeable and do not wield influence in shaping legislative pursuits or outcomes; they may have room to choose the means to advance goals, but the goals themselves ultimately must be those of the party majority. Others give more credit to individual personalities and leadership styles but still primarily emphasize the role of institutional constraints; Cooper and Brady (1981) write "Institutional context rather than personal skill is the primary determinant of leadership power in the House. To be sure, style is affected by personal traits. Nonetheless, style must be responsive to and congruent with both the inducements available to leaders and member expectations regarding proper behavior" (423).

Yet with bold, assertive, 'larger than life' personality types like Republican Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (1995-1999) making it increasingly difficult to accept the point of view that Congressional leaders are interchangeable, more recent work lends significant credence to the role that the personalities and ambitions of specific party leaders play in terms of handling institutional constraints and determining Congressional leadership power. As Rohde (2000) writes, "The personality and skills of leaders play a significant role, and Gingrich epitomized this aspect of the theory. Just as Democratic Speaker Tom Foley's reluctance to use the institutional powers available to him made him a weaker Speaker than he had to be, Gingrich's approach enhanced his power and facilitated its exercise" (212). Scholars of this viewpoint contend that party leaders can be causal agents as well as causal followers (Jacobs et al. 1998, Mayhew 2000, Schickler 2001, Strahan 2007, Evans and Grandy 2009, Green 2010). Evans and Grandy (2009) write that party leaders "are more than passive responders to the predetermined views and positions of legislators, and under the right conditions can exert significant influence over the coalition building process" (210). Similarly, Strahan (2007) and Green (2010) contend that if presented with the opportunity, some Congressional leaders will be willing to take political risks to advance personal legislative goals that may clash with those of the party majority- particularly if these goals are electoral (impacting their reelection prospects) in nature, but also those related to their

personal beliefs, concerns about enacting good public policy, or concerns about their future legacies/reputations.

The Congressional leadership and gun control

Overall, while there is a general consensus in the literature that institutional constraints keep party leaders in check, more recent work lends increasing significance to the role that individual personality and style play in determining how successfully leaders are able to work within or maneuver these constraints to exert power and influence. In terms of this study of gun control polarization, the thesis argues that while party leaders did operate within the institutional and electoral constraints they faced, their individual personalities and leadership style (particularly that of the Republican leadership) played a critical role in precipitating the party shifts that resulted in near complete polarization on the issue. Ultimately, for understanding the role played by party leaders in this polarization story, both institutional/electoral constraints and individual personalities and leadership style matter.

Congressional voting behavior

One of the fundamental questions in the literature on Congress is the following: what motivates Congressional behavior? In his seminal study of Congressional committees in the House, Fenno (1973) cited three main goals of legislators: reelection, gaining influence within their chamber, and enacting good public policy. Mayhew (1974) supported Fenno's multiple goals theory but elevated one specific goal above the rest, contending that the proximate concern of Congressional members is their reelection to office. For, Mayhew argued, while members pursue multiple aims, reelection is "the goal that must be achieved over and over if other ends are to be entertained...reelection underlies everything else, as indeed it should if we are to expect that the relation between politicians and the public will be one of accountability" (Mayhew, 1974, 17).

Later scholars backed Mayhew's electoral emphasis, Arnold (1990) writing that "reelection is their dominant goal" and that "electoral calculations shape everything from legislators roll-call decisions to the strategies and tactics of coalition leaders" (Arnold, 1990, 5). He further added that while members will always consider how a potential vote will impact their future electoral success, if they determine there is no 'correct' answer, they will base their decision on any other factors they find relevant (such as a belief that one policy

choice is more effective or because of a desire to curry favor with their party leadership). Kingdon (1998) similarly argued that legislators regularly attempt to anticipate how specific roll call votes might be used against them and "regularly adjust their votes in ways designed to forestall electoral problems" (Kingdon, 1998. 7). However, Kingdon did adopt a slightly different view than Mayhew and Arnold, ultimately contending that "satisfying constituents" is the primary goal of the legislator rather than simply "reelection." Overall, while multiple goals have been cited in the literature as contributing to Congressional decision making and voting behavior, most agree that reelection is a major, if not the proximate, goal of legislators.

Congressional voting behavior and partisanship

The seminal works on Congressional behavior (Fenno 1973, Mayhew 1974) emphasize the legislator as an electorally independent individual; the role of political parties are viewed as secondary in importance. Yet partisanship has long been a feature of the American political system. Even prior to party realignment and the creation of two ideologically distinct parties with divergent agendas, Truman (1959) and Jones (1961) observed a widespread tendency for members to default to party line voting in the absence of competing pressures, this tendency fostering a baseline of partisanship in Congress. So what motivates legislators to vote the party line? There are numerous incentives that encourage partisan voting, such as the desire to forge bonds of political loyalty with fellow partisans, obtain desirable committee assignments, or work towards an eventual leadership role within the party (Olson 1966, Miller and Jennings 1986, Smith 2007, Lee 2009). The political parties are also a key source for reelection campaign funding and other forms of support, (such as conducting polling on behalf of candidates, door to door campaigning, and running television advertisements) while members of Congress need their fellow partisans and party leaders to pursue and potentially achieve the policy outcomes that their constituents want (Maisel 2007, Smith 2007).

And while there have long been a myriad of political and electoral incentives to voting the party line, inducements to do so have only increased as partisan polarization has grown. Lee (2009) and Jacobson (2009) have argued that members of Congress have a significant electoral interest in how their party is perceived by the public; they recognize that their reelectability is not solely linked to their personal characteristics or voting records but to the general reputation of their party. With polarization increasing and national elections often

becoming a referendum on the sitting president (as has been argued about the 1994, 2006, and 2010 midterm elections) (Jacobson 1996 & 2009, Smith 2007) partisans today, and particularly those in marginal Senate seats or Congressional districts, have a significant electoral interest in their party (and if applicable, its president) succeeding and the opposing party losing on key agenda items, an interest that exists irrespective of their individual electoral incentives.

Congressional voting behavior and gun control

Strahan (2007) notes that for most of the last fifty plus years, "supporting the party appears to be a default voting strategy for most legislators" (345). Yet as will be demonstrated throughout the thesis, members of Congress have and will cross the party line when their individual electoral incentives clash with the position of their party. Overall, while many factors have contributed to the party shifts, this thesis is fundamentally about how electoral pressures/incentives for opposition group members in regard to gun control voting have changed over time. In conclusion, a critical point made in the Introductory chapter needs to be re-emphasized: while there are many factors which influence Congressional voting behavior, an underlying assumption of this thesis is that electoral concerns (i.e. concerns relating to one's reelection prospects) are the primary factor influencing the voting of most Congressional members in regard to the gun control issue.

Part IV: The gun control literature

Before concluding this literature review chapter, mention must be made of the sizable academic literature on gun control in the United States. The breadth of this literature is vast, comprising a range of subtopics that include Constitutional interpretations of the Second Amendment (Malcolm 1994, Bogus 2001, Winkler 2011), debates over whether high gun ownership levels are positively (Kellerman et al 1993, Zimring and Hawkins 1997, Duggan 2001, Kwon 2005) or inversely (Kleck and Patterson 1993, Lott 2000, Wilson 2007) related to high rates of violent crime and homicide, and debates over the existence of a uniquely American gun culture (Kohn 2004, Burbick 2006, Melzer 2009, Carlson 2015).

In terms of the politics of the issue, a major focus in recent decades has been on policy stagnation at the federal level, as no significant gun control legislation has been enacted since the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban were signed into law during the 103rd Congress (1993-1994). 'Why is passing gun control so difficult?' is a question that

scholars have returned to repeatedly. Some credit the fractured federalist system, which makes it inherently difficult to pass any federal legislation, let alone divisive legislation with well organized, single issue voter opposition such as gun control (Squires 2000, Vizzard 2000, Goss 2006). Related to this, others have credited the political and electoral power of the National Rifle Association for putting significant pressure on legislators to oppose gun control (Gray Davidson 1993, Anderson 1996, Singer and Patterson 2007). Some contend that the answers can be found by better understanding how the electorate views the issue; Goss (2006) argues that there has historically been a 'missing movement' for gun control because the benefits of supporting it are diffused rather than concentrated, whereas for opponents who have something tangible to lose if stricter gun controls are passed it is the opposite. This explains why opponents of gun control are more likely to be single issue voters and thus foster a greater degree of electoral pressure for members of Congress than gun control proponents.

A gap in the literature

But while all of these explanations are plausible contributing factors to gun control policy stagnation at the federal level, the institutional constraints of federalism, NRA lobbying tactics, and the nature of diffused versus concentrated benefits for gun issue voters have not significantly changed in the decades since the 103rd Congress. As a result, they are not able to explain why Congress was able to pass the most significant federal gun controls in the nation's history during that Congress but not in the decades since.

Increasing partisan polarization on the gun control issue has not evaded the notice of gun control scholars; for example, Cook and Goss (2014) mention the widening partisan gap as "one of the most interesting developments (for gun control) over the past two decades" (180). Yet while it has been acknowledged, no studies have been published that explain precisely how and why this widening partisan gap on the issue has occurred, despite its ability to provide a compelling explanation for policy stagnation. It does so because with an entire party currently unwilling to support gun control, the onus is completely on the Democratic party to engender the numbers necessary to pass it- a practical impossibility in the years since the gun control debate was revitalized in late 2012, as the party has not had majority control of both chambers since the 111th Congress (2009-2010). Considering the size of the Democratic anti-control minority opposition group during the 1990s, the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban would not have passed during the 103rd Congress without

Republican support. So what changed for Republican gun control supporters over time? This question, it seems, is a critical one for understanding one of the main barriers to the successful passage of gun control today. By offering an explanation (as well as for the changes which have led to an increase in Democratic support), the thesis will make key contributions to both the policy stagnation field and the broader academic literature on gun control politics in the United States.

Chapter Three: Key gun control variables

This chapter will introduce key variables relevant for understanding Congressional gun control voting during the 103rd Congress of 1993-1994 (the starting point of analysis), variables which have been tracked and analyzed throughout the thesis. The first three (crime, district type, and region) are critical for understanding why there was both bipartisan support for and opposition to gun control; how the relationship between these variables and party members changed (or didn't change) will crucially shed light on the dissolution of each party's minority opposition group over time. The fourth variable which will be discussed (gun issue interest groups, and primarily the NRA) does not play a direct role in the shift towards hyper polarization on gun control, but is nonetheless a key player in the Congressional gun control debate and a valuable component of the thesis's polarization story.

Variable 1: Crime

Shortly before announcing his retirement, then Republican House Minority leader Bob Michel referred to his party during the 103rd Congress (1993-1994) as "the most conservative and antagonistic to the other side" that he had witnessed during his 38-year tenure in the House (Connelly and Pitney 1994, 23). Throughout this Congress, the parties bitterly contested issues such as president Clinton's healthcare plan (which failed to even come to a vote), voting rights legislation (which passed but was a nearly fully partisan polarized vote), and Clinton's budget (which passed, but without a single Republican vote in support) (Sinclair 2006, 171). Yet also occurring amidst this acrimonious and partisan Congress was the passage of landmark gun control legislation (the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban- both of which, like healthcare and the budget, were key agenda items for president Clinton), an outcome which, given opposition to gun control within the Democratic party, would not have been possible without bipartisan cooperation. What explains this noteworthy show of bipartisanship? To comprehend it first necessitates an understanding of the political context within which this Congress operated. During this political era, there was one issue which frequently dominated political discourse and shaped debate, an issue which would become deeply entwined with (and would come to elevate the electoral significance of) gun control. This issue was crime.

Part I. Overview: The politics of crime

Beginning in the mid-1960s and continuing throughout the 1990s, the crime issue would come to dominate the political landscape in the United States (Garland 2001). Concerns about crime first came to national prominence during the 1964 presidential campaign, when Republican candidate Barry Goldwater called for the need to "enforce law and order" to address "violence in the streets" during his speech at the Republican national convention (Gest 2001, 57), a move that would establish crime as an issue of national concern when previously it had been predominantly viewed as a state/local issue.

In the following decades, an abundance of crime policy (including capital punishment laws after its reinstatement by the Supreme Court in 1976, drug offense sentencing laws in 1986, and three strikes sentencing laws in the early 1990s) would be debated and enacted at the federal, state, and local levels, with punitive legislation predominating. The 'tough on crime' policies of this political era would significantly contribute to America's skyrocketing incarceration rate, with nearly as many individuals being incarcerated during the 1990s than had been in the country's entire history up to that point (Schiraldi et al 2009).

"Tough on crime:" A bipartisan stance

By the mid-1980s, supporting the enactment of punitive anti-crime policies had come to be a popular and bipartisan political stance. This was particularly evident in the presidential campaigns of the time, where the candidates battled to prove to the public that they were tougher on crime than their opponent. Willie Horton and his famous furlough (in which he committed assault, armed robbery, and rape while taking advantage of a weekend furlough program from his Massachusetts prison) took center stage in the 1988 presidential campaign, with Republican candidate George H.W Bush using the incident to accuse his Democratic opponent Michael Dukakis, who was Governor of Massachusetts during the incident, of being 'soft on crime' (Anderson 1995, 93). During the 1992 presidential debates, four crime related questions were posed, and the candidates were quick to bring up the issue on their own. Defending his lack of political experience, Independent candidate Ross Perot stated, "Well, they've got a point... I don't have any experience in creating the most violent crime-ridden society in the industrialized world," while Democratic Governor Bill Clinton proclaimed that passing a tough omnibus crime bill "is going to be one of my highest

priorities next January if I become president" (Commission on Presidential Debates, October 11, 1992).

And taking a hard line on crime was not merely a presidential campaign tactic; the issue was mentioned in nearly every State of the Union Address given from the mid-1980s through the final year of the Clinton presidency. For example, in his 1991 speech, Republican President George H.W Bush told the audience "we need tough crime control legislation and we need it now" (State of the Union, January 29, 1991), while Democratic President Bill Clinton urged Congress to pass a "strong, smart, tough crime bill" during his 1994 speech (State of the Union, January 25, 1994). And Clinton was not merely a rogue 'tough on crime' Democrat amidst a sea of Republicans (Republicans historically having been viewed by the public as the party that was tougher on crime (Idelson, 16 April 1994, Dagan and Teles 2016, 22). Numerous Congressional Democrats during this era also advocated for punitive anti-crime legislation and ran on 'tough on crime' campaign platforms. For example, Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman and future vice president Joe Biden was one of the chief drafters of the 1994 omnibus crime bill, proudly referring to it throughout his career as the "1994 Biden Crime Bill" (Fandos 2015), while Democratic House Speaker Tom Foley (WA-5th) touted his support for this same "tough crime bill" in radio ads during his 1994 reelection campaign (Meyer and DeWolf 1994). Illinois Senator Paul Simon (D) summed up the bipartisan anti-crime sentiment during this era astutely: "We all want to try to outdo each other looking tough on crime...Nobody wants to have a 30-second commercial running against you that you're soft on crime" (Locin 1993, 2).

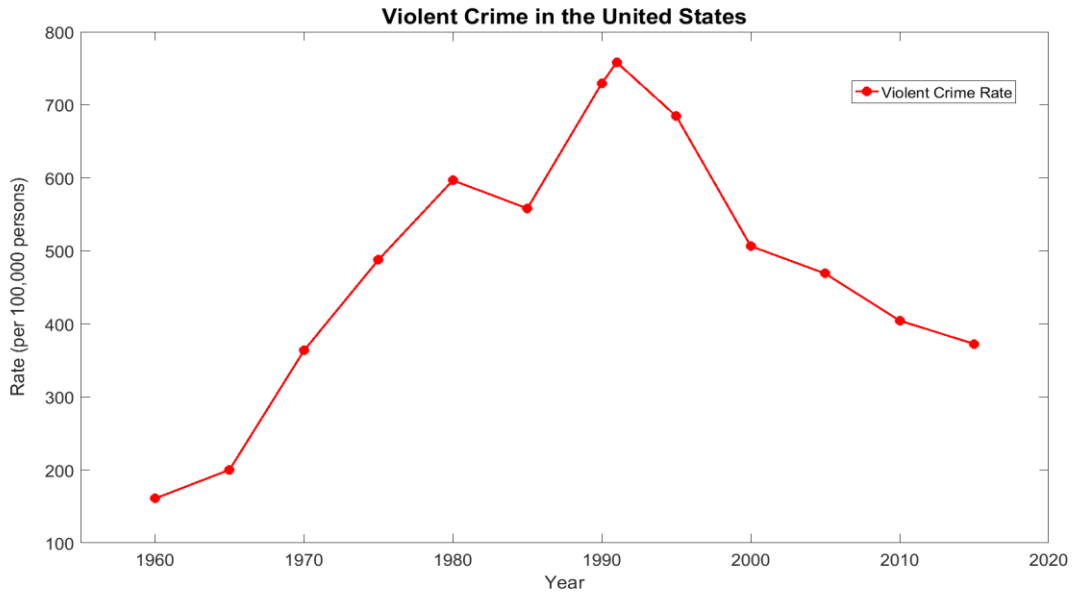
Rising crime rates

The preoccupation with crime that typified this political era was not bred in a vacuum; concerns about crime were not unfounded. Since the mid-1960s, the national violent crime rate[1] had been steadily increasing, ultimately reaching a peak of 758.2 per 100,000 persons in 1991 (compared to a rate of 160.9 in 1960 and 386.3 in 2016- the most recent year with available data). And while the national property crime rate[2] had technically peaked in 1980 (at 5,353.3 per 100,000 persons), it was also close to peak levels in the early 1990s. It is

[1] Which comprises the offenses of murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault (FBI Uniform Crime Reporting).
[2] Which comprises the offenses of burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft (FBI Uniform Crime Reporting).

worth noting that these crime rates are national averages; as will be discussed, rising crime rates in many urban areas significantly contributed to rising crime rates nationally.

Graph 1: Violent crime in the United States



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports.

Graph 2: Property crime in the United States

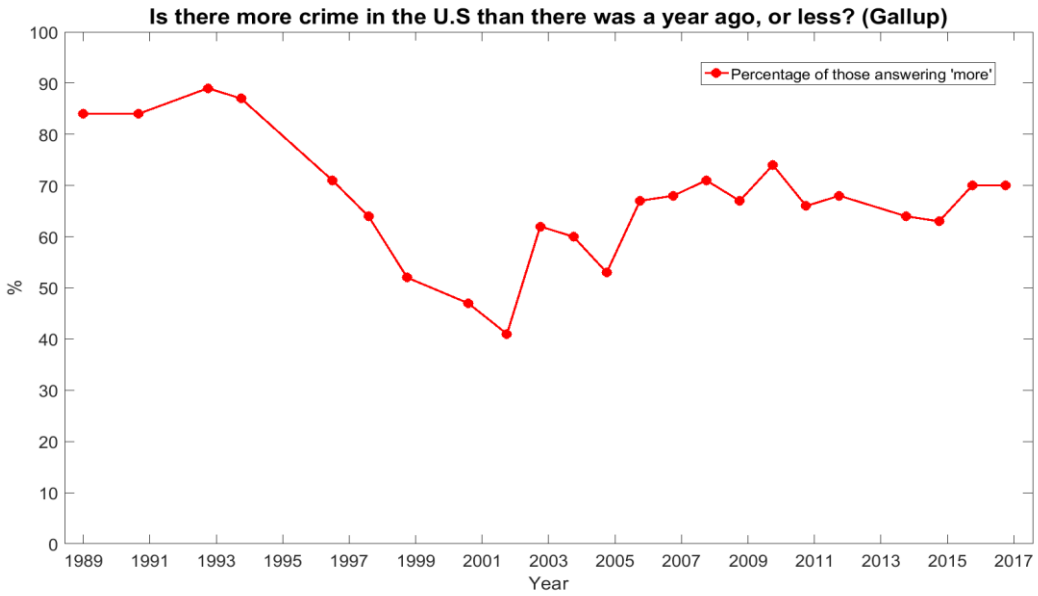


Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports.

Public perceptions of crime

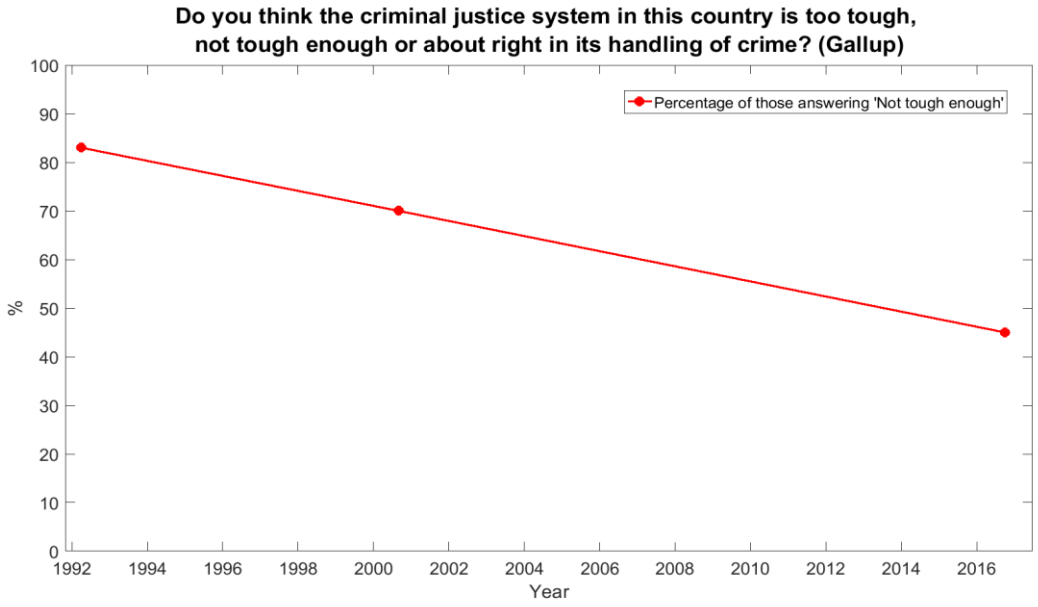
What was arguably even more influential in positioning crime as a top political issue were public perceptions of crime. Polling data from the Gallup organization indicates that public concerns about crime, like crime rates, were also peaking during the early nineties. For example, to the question, “Is there more crime in the U.S than a year ago, or less?” the percentage of respondents answering ‘more’ peaked in February of 1992 at 89 percent (Gallup).

Graph 3: “Is there more crime in the U.S than a year ago, or less?” (Gallup)



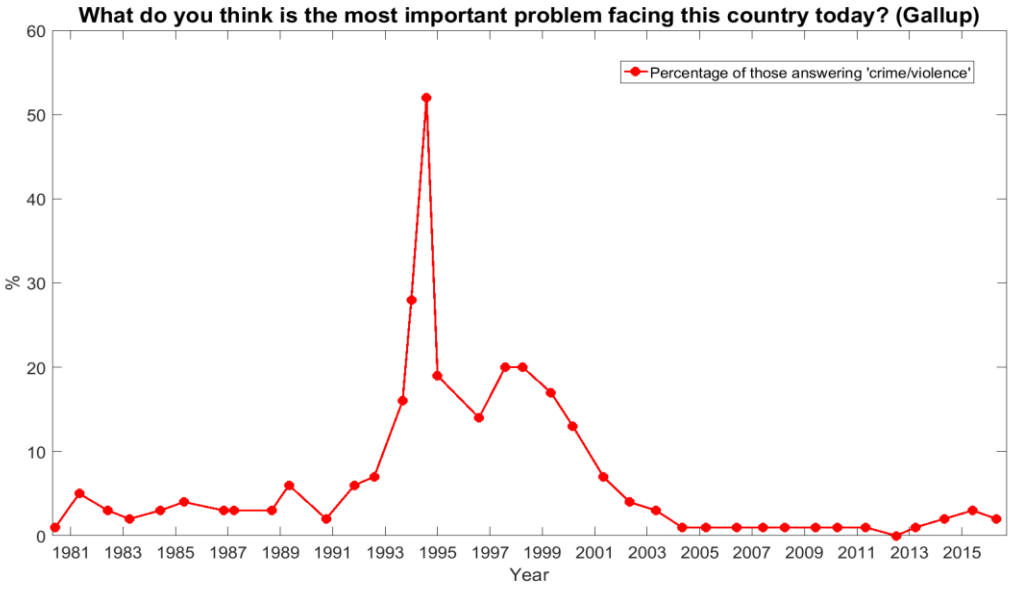
Additionally, while the Gallup Organization has only asked the following question about the toughness of the U.S criminal justice system three times, the polling data available indicates that concerns about the system being ‘not tough enough’ peaked in April 1992, at 83 percent.

Graph 4: “Do you think the criminal justice system in this country is too tough, not tough enough, or about right in its handling of crime?” (Gallup)



Perhaps the most compelling evidence that public concerns about crime were peaking in the early nineties comes from the ‘most important problem’ question posed by the Gallup Organization. From October 1990 to January 1993, the percentage of respondents answering that crime/violence was the most important problem facing the country increased from 2 to 28 percent; by August of 1994, more than half of respondents (52 percent) would identify crime as the most important issue. This was greater than the 29 percent who named healthcare and the 27 percent who named the economy in general as the most important issues, making crime/violence the top concern for voters in 1994.

Graph's 5a and 5b: "What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?" (Gallup)



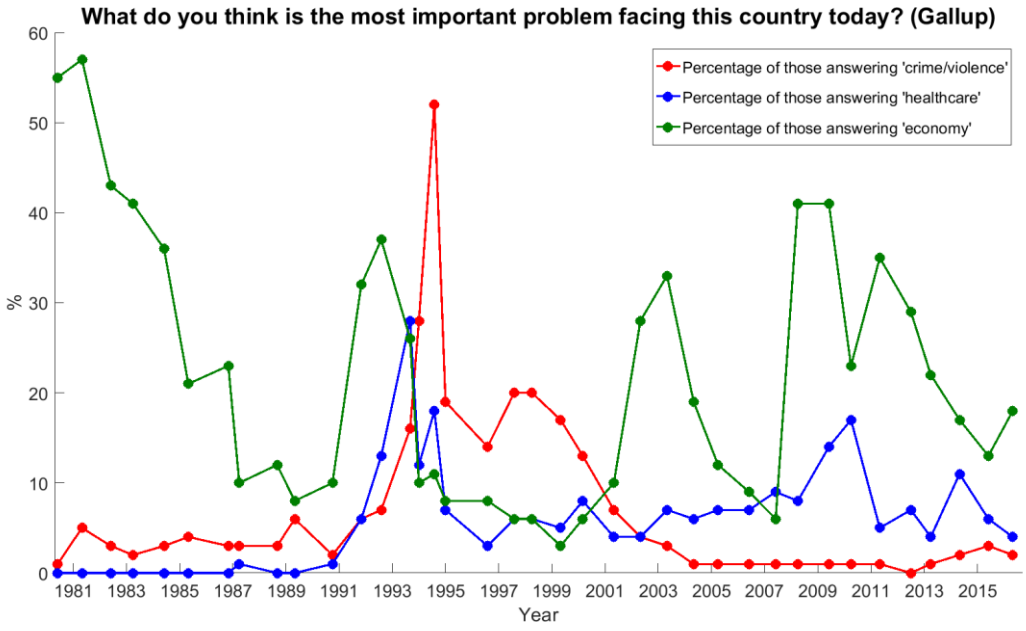


Table 1: What do you think is the most important issue facing the country today? (August 1994)

52%	Crime/violence
29%	Healthcare costs
27%	The economy (general)
9%	Drugs
7%	Ethics in society/moral decline
6%	Unemployment/jobs
5%	Poverty/homelessness
5%	Dissatisfaction with government
5%	Education
5%	Other (non-economic)
3%	Federal budget/deficit
2%	High cost of living/inflation
1%	Taxes
1%	Medicaid

*Source: Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll, August 1994

Crime: Perception versus reality

Historically, survey research has indicated that fear of crime in the U.S is much more prevalent than actual victimization (Miethe 1995, Warr 2000, Farrall et al 2009). Scholars have argued that public perceptions of crime and fear of crime victimization are shaped in large part by media depictions (both news and entertainment media)(Miethe 1995, Reiner 2008), which have played "a key role in heightening the social significance of crime" (Farrall 2009, 112). In addition to the role of mass media, others have argued that the prevalence of crime concerns and fear of crime is a reflection of broader concerns about social change, inequality, and instability in the modern era (Taylor and Jamieson 1998, Bauman 2000, Girling et al 2000, Garland 2001).

Whether due to the influence of actual crime rates, broader concerns about social change, or skewed media representations, the crime issue had for decades captured the public's attention, and would continue to be viewed by many Americans as "a routine part of modern consciousness" (Garland, 2001, 107) and "a major social problem in contemporary American society" (Miethe, 1995, 14) throughout the 1990s. With crime having cemented itself as an issue of electoral concern, the crime policy-making process in the U.S during this era had become "profoundly politicized and populist" (Garland, 2001, 13). With polling in 1994 indicating that crime surpassed both healthcare and the economy as the top issue concerning the public (see table 1 above), it was no surprise that the 103rd Congress was determined to pass an omnibus crime package during their second session. After a steady build up over two decades, the crime issue, for both politicians and voters, had reached a political zenith.

Part II. Gun control and the politics of crime

Faced with steadily increasing crime rates and growing public concerns about crime, politicians during this political era promoted the enactment of anti-crime legislation to thwart criminal activity and reduce crime rates. For many, a 'tough on crime' agenda necessitated the inclusion of gun controls. Throughout his campaign for president in 1992, Democrat Bill Clinton repeatedly cited gun control as a key component of his anti-crime agenda. Standing with the president of the Police Officers Association in Houston, Texas, he would tell a gathering crowd that "I want to be tough on crime...It is crazy to believe that we shouldn't at least try to give our police officers a fair fight in the fight to keep our streets safe. That's why I believe you ought to be for the Brady bill" (Ifill 1992, 2).

Having won the 1992 presidential election, in August of 1993 the now president Clinton outlined plans for an anti-crime package which contained various provisions, including steps to hire more police officers, build more prisons, alter federal death penalty legislation, create programs to prevent and prosecute violence against women, and create tougher sentencing measures (Idelson, April 16, 1994). And, as promised during his presidential campaign, his anti-crime plan also included both the Brady background checks bill and an Assault weapons ban, the latter of which would be included within the omnibus crime bill (titled the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act) that would eventually

pass in 1994. Why was Clinton determined[3] to include gun control as part of his 'tough on crime' agenda?

Public policy: Gun control as crime control

In one sense, pursuing gun control policy was practical from a crime reduction standpoint, given that a connection between firearm use and violent crime rates during this era was difficult to dismiss. A 1995 Federal Bureau of Investigation report into weapons used in crime offenses determined that during the time period from 1985 to 1994, "firearms related offenses were chiefly responsible for the 42 percent increase in murders, robberies, and aggravated assaults that were reported" (FBI Uniform Crime Report 1995, 12). The FBI ultimately concluded that the 1990's had become "The decade most prone to firearm use for violent crime" (FBI Crime Index: Offenses Reported 1995, 11, 13).

Public opinion: Gun control as crime control

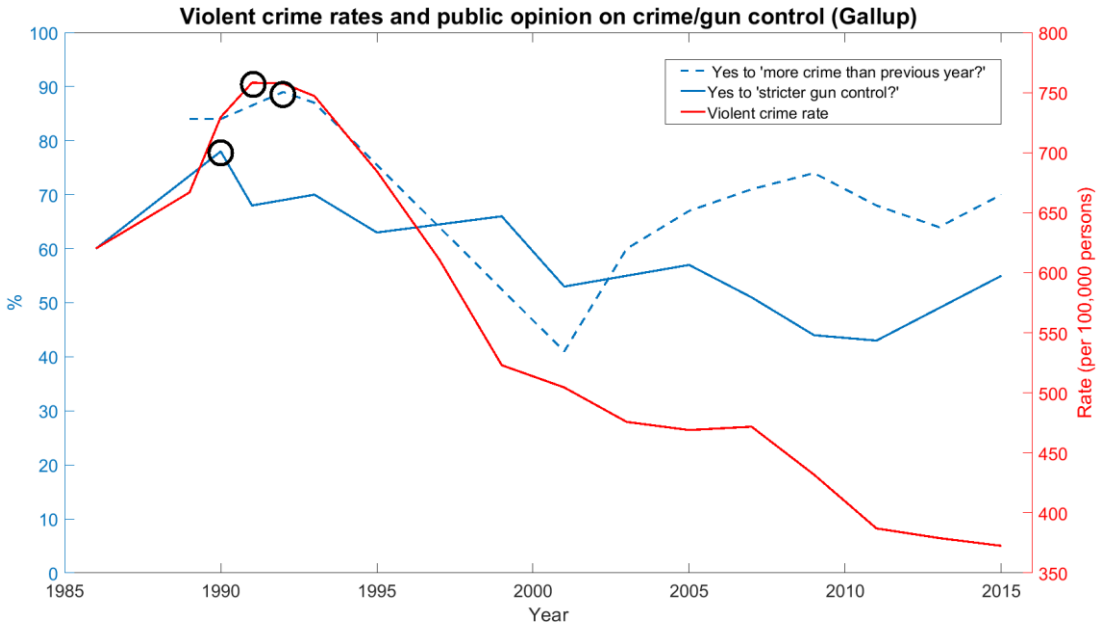
And critically, in addition to its potential efficacy as a crime reduction tool, a majority of the public appeared to believe that gun availability and crime rates were linked, and that gun control was a crucial component of crime control. While no time series data is available (questions about the relationship between rising crime and gun control were not asked by the same organizations in later years), polling taken around the timeframe of the 103rd Congress strongly supports this contention. For example, an April 1993 Harvard School of Public Health poll asked respondents "How much do you feel that the availability of guns and the increase in the number of guns that are sold and bought have contributed to the violence that exists now?" with 61 percent answering that the availability of guns contributed "a great deal" to existing violence. Similarly, a May 1994 U.S News and World Report poll posed the question "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? In communities where more of the average citizens own guns, there is less crime." In response, 30 percent disagreed strongly that more guns would mean less crime, with 25 percent disagreeing somewhat and only 16 percent agreeing strongly.

[3] It is often the case with social regulatory policy that the president's impact on the success of specific legislation is 'marginal' and 'primarily symbolic' (Spitzer, 2012, 16). Yet in the case of the gun controls of the 103rd Congress, scholars have attributed Clinton's leadership and unwillingness to budge on the issue with providing political momentum to the cause and rallying support for the legislation within his party. Clinton is credited with helping to convince some 30 Democrats in the House to switch their positions to support the Assault Weapons ban in May of 1994 (Idelson, 7 May 1994).

Polling data from this timeframe also indicates there was majority public support for the opinion that stricter gun controls would play a key role in combating crime. A November 1994 ABC News poll told respondents "I am going to mention some things which some people say might reduce the amount of crime in this country," asking to what degree they believed making guns less available would reduce crime. 43 percent responded that making guns less available would be 'very effective' in reducing crime, while 22 percent answered that it would be 'effective'. Only 21 percent responded that making guns less available would be 'very ineffective.' As another example, an August 1993 Time/CNN poll asked respondents "Do you think that legislation designed to reduce the amount of violent crime in this country can do so without imposing stricter gun control laws, or do you think stricter gun control laws are a necessary part of any anti-crime bill?" 65 percent responded that gun control laws were "necessary to any anti-crime bill," compared to 28 percent who said an anti-crime bill "could reduce crime without gun control."

And perhaps most significantly, that public support for stricter gun controls generally was reaching peak levels within two years of when national crime rates and public concerns about rising crime were also peaking (peak levels for each are circled in graph 6) indicates a compelling link between crime concerns and support for gun controls amongst the public during this time period.

Graph 6: Violent crime rates and public opinion on crime, gun control (Gallup)



Sources: FBI Uniform Crime Reports, Gallup.

Gun control: An issue of electoral concern

Technically, there had long been majority public support for gun control irrespective of crime rates or public concerns about crime. According to the Gallup Organization, no less than 59 percent (and on average roughly two-thirds) of Americans consistently reported favoring the passage of stricter gun controls from the mid-1970s up to the timeframe of the 103rd Congress (1993-1994); Erskine (1983) summed up her analysis of gun control polling with the following statement: "The vast majority of Americans have favored some kind of action for the control of civilian firearms at least as long as modern polling has been in existence" (Erskine, 1982, 455). And in terms of the specific legislation being considered during this Congress, there was also majority public support. For example, in a 1993 Gallup poll, 88 percent of respondents indicated that they favored a waiting period before an individual would be allowed to purchase a handgun (McAneny 1993), while a 1992 New York Times/CBS News poll found that 79 percent of respondents supported a ban on assault weapons (Spitzer 2012, 119).

Yet what is critical to understand is that while there had long been majority public support for gun control, it had never achieved the status of priority political issue. Crime on the other hand, had- and as the crime and gun control issues became entwined and a majority of the public came to view gun control as a crucial component of crime control, the salience of crime elevated the electoral significance of gun control for many members of Congress, who faced constituent pressure to support it to be 'tough on crime.' Without being connected to a priority political issue, majority public support for gun control in itself would not necessarily have fostered the same degree of electoral pressure that it did during the crime control debates of this decade. That president Clinton and the Democratic leadership (who had agenda setting control in both chambers of Congress) chose to include gun control within the party's anti-crime agenda during the 103rd Congress indicates that they viewed gun control as an electorally valuable issue for the party nationally; they would not have pursued gun control as crime control (however plausible its efficacy) if they believed doing so would damage the party's future electoral prospects.

The salience of crime and gun control: Conclusions

This section has discussed the salience of crime as a priority political issue in the United States and unpacked its implications for Congressional gun control voting. As will be

demonstrated in the following chapters, the salience of crime fostered bipartisan support for gun control in the 1990s by elevating its electoral significance for members of both parties, who faced pressure to support it to be 'tough on crime.' Crime and its interconnected relationship to gun control is a crucial component of the thesis's polarization story (and specifically as relates to the Republican party's polarization trajectory), as its eventual decline as a priority political issue critically influenced the Republican party's shift in favor of gun rights in the mid-2000s. The relationship between crime and gun control and the former variables influence on polarization in regard to the latter is a unique contributing factor that distinguishes gun control polarization from polarization on other issues.

Variable 2: District type

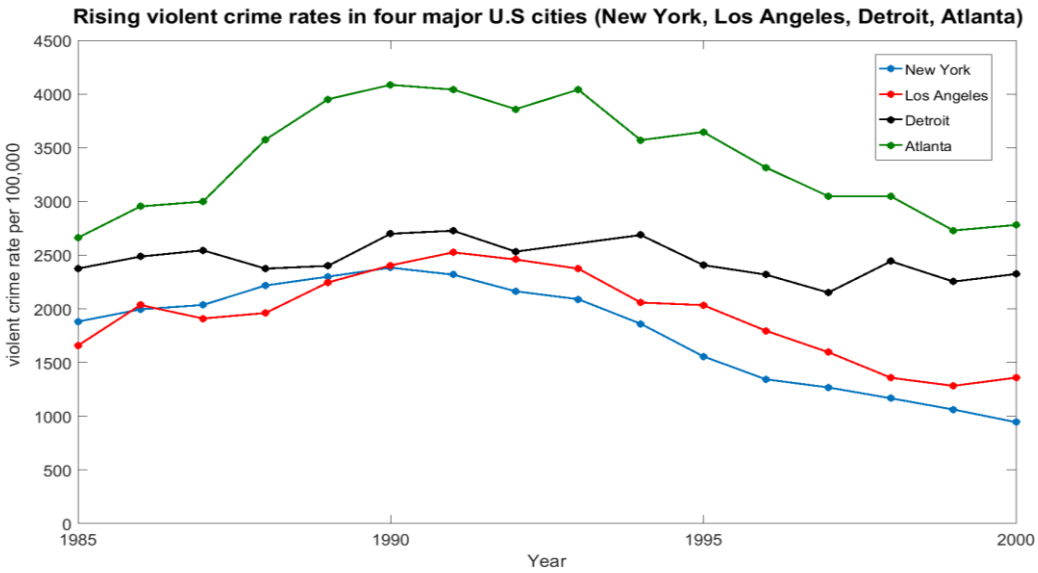
As outlined in the methods section (refer to page 18), throughout the thesis each member of the House of representatives has been classified as an urban, mixed/suburban, or rural district representative. As will become evident in the thesis's roll call voting analysis, district type is a relevant variable for understanding Congressional voting on gun control- as, during the 103rd Congress and beyond, district type divides in voting on gun control were present in both parties. And critically, the crime and district type variables had an interconnected relationship, as the salience of crime as a priority political issue elevated the electoral significance of gun control for specific types of district representatives. Using the 103rd Congress (1993-1994) as the baseline for analysis, a brief explanation of each district type is found below.

Urban representatives

The greatest percentage of support for gun control by district type came from urban representatives, who had significant electoral incentive to support it during this crime concerned period. Urban areas had higher violent crime rates than the national average (a rate of 774.4 per 100,000 compared to 684.6), with agencies such as the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation separately concluding that rising crime rates in urban areas in particular (see graphs 7 and 8 below) strongly contributed to the rising national violent crime rate which peaked in 1991 (Duhart 2000). And historically, violent crime rates

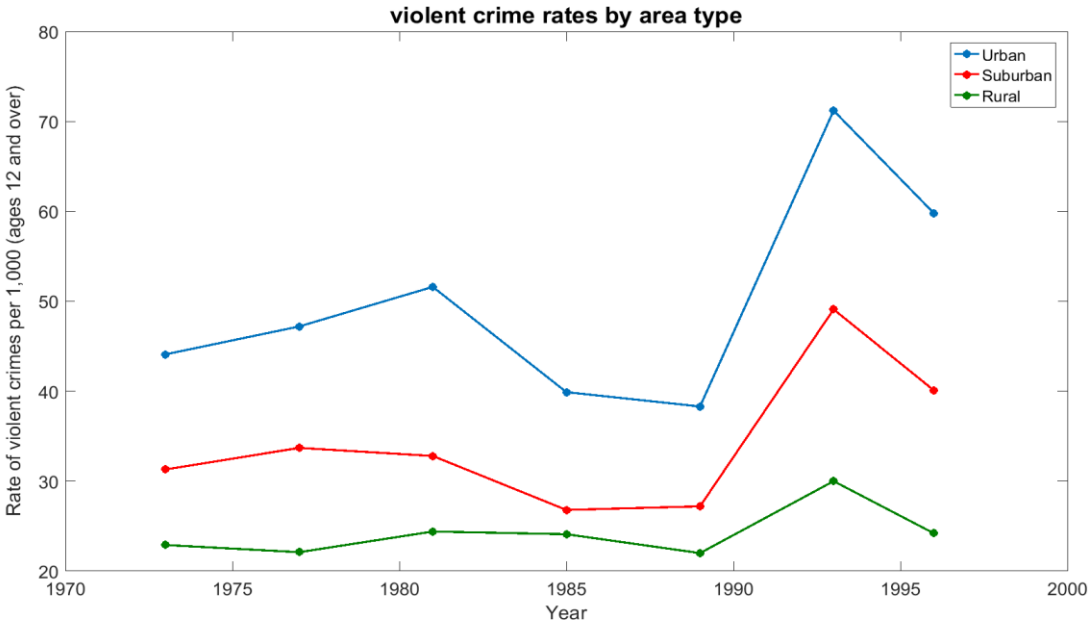
in urban areas were significantly higher than in both suburban and rural areas[4] (also shown in graph 8 below).

Graph 7: Rising violent crime rates in four major U.S cities in the early 1990s (New York, Los Angeles, Detroit, Atlanta)



Source: FBI

Graph 8: Violent crime rates by area type (1973-1996)



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics

[4] Using the closest available crime data to the 103rd Congress which was broken down by area (from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's 1995 Uniform Crime Report), the violent crime rate for urban areas was 774.4 per 100,000, compared to 482.7 and 233.7 for suburban and rural areas respectively (Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Report 1995).

Additionally, residents of urban areas have historically reported the highest levels of fear of crime by area type[5] (Skogan and Maxfield 1981, Smith and Huff 1982, Davis 1990, McAneny 1993), while polling data also indicates that urban residents report the highest levels of support for gun control by area type[6] (Pew). With higher crime rates in their districts than the national average and with public fear of crime and support for gun control both peaking (see graph 6 on page 56) and highest among urban residents, the electoral pressure for urban representatives to support gun control to be 'tough on crime' during this period was significant.

Mixed/suburban representatives

Support for gun control amongst those representing mixed or suburban districts in the House was greater than for rural representatives but less than for urban ones, which is predictable given that suburban violent crime rates have historically fallen between urban and rural rates (see graph above). As will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, a key factor influencing whether these types of representatives (and in particular Republicans) supported gun control was the proximity of their district to a major U.S city or urban area. For while crime rates and public fears about crime were highest in urban areas, during the early 1990s, the perception that violent crime was bleeding into the suburbs was widespread.

Suburban crime and the news media

Scholars such as Miethe (1995) and Farrall (2009) have argued that public perceptions of crime and fear of crime victimization are shaped in large part by mass media depictions, which have played "a key role in heightening the social significance of crime" (Farrall 2009, 112). In the early 1990s, the news media played a critical role in perpetuating the notion that

[5] While no time series data on urban fear of crime is available, numerous studies and polls have shown urban fear of crime to be higher than suburban or rural fear. For example, Skogan and Maxfield (1981) found that individuals living in urban areas (and lower income minorities in particular) were more fearful of crime than their suburban and rural counterparts. An American Housing survey question asked respondents in 1991 what bothered them most about their neighborhoods, with 15 percent of urban residents specifically mentioning crime, compared to less than 2 percent of rural residents (DeFrances and Smith 1994). Additionally, a 1993 Time/CNN poll found that the majority of urban respondents polled (59 percent) 'frequently worried' about being a victim of crime, (McAneny 1993) while Warr (1985) and Ferrarro (1995) both found that urban dwellers (along with minorities, women and the elderly) were groups that were particularly fearful of crime victimization.

[6] Since the Pew Research Center began measuring public support for gun control by area in 2003, the greatest support has consistently come from individuals living in urban areas, with the least amount of support coming from those living in rural areas (support from suburban individuals, predictably, has historically fallen between urban and rural) ('Gun rights versus gun control.' *Pew.*).

across the nation urban crime was bleeding into the suburbs. In February of 1992, *The New York Times* ran a piece on rising robbery rates in the suburbs of the New York City metropolitan area, quoting locals who reported that "No one feels safe anymore" and "The suburbs aren't what they used to be" (Barbanel 1992, 2). A 1992 *Fortune* magazine article on rising suburban crime began with the line "All across suburbia- on streets named after birds and trees and blossoms- fear is spreading. It is beginning to change the way suburbanites (nearly half the U.S. population) spend their money, how they drive, where and when they shop, how they dress" (Farnham 1992, 1). In 1993 *The Boston Globe* published a piece on an increase in suburban homicides with the title "City sees its pain spread to suburbs" (Canellos 1993) while *The Los Angeles Times* reported that "A stain spreads in suburbia" in a featured article on rising crime in the mostly white, middle class suburb[7] of Lakewood, California (Ferrell and Sengupta 1993). As a final example, in one of the more memorable magazine covers of this political era, the August 1993 cover of *Time* magazine (which catered to a national audience-including suburban residents) depicted what appeared to be a dark complexioned male[8] wearing a hoodie and gold chain with the title "America the Violent" and the caption "Crime is spreading and patience is running out" (*Time,* August 23, 1993).

While overly sensationalized by the media, the perception of rising suburban crime during this timeframe was not completely without merit (see graph 8). A 1992 report from the Bureau of Justice determined that while violent crime rates in suburban areas had peaked in 1979 (at 34.8 per 1,000), suburban crime had been increasing in the past several years (Bachman 1992). Whether due to the influence of media sensationalizing of suburban crime, actual crime statistics, or personal experience with crime, many suburban residents in the early nineties reported being highly concerned about crime. A poll conducted by the National Opinion Research Council in 1991 found that 42 percent of suburban residents living near

[7] Some scholars have suggested that the media obsession with suburban crime during this timeframe was due to a tendency for it to be considered more important and 'newsworthy' than urban crime because suburban residents tended to be more affluent and were predominantly white (Clark 1993).

[8] King and Smith (2005) contend that no discussion of American politics is adequate if the impact of race is not explicitly considered. In terms of the crime issue, there is compelling evidence to suggest that over time the issue has become racialized. Federal anti-crime legislation such as the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 led to vast racial disparities in sentencing throughout the 1990s (Porter and Wright 2011), while much of the crime rhetoric of this era (for example members of Congress citing "drive-through, drive-by, and drive-in shootings" (103rd Cong. Rec. H9093 (1993)) and "15-year-old gang members armed like commandos" (103rd Cong. Rec. H3089 (1994)) appears to have racial implications, as gang activity has typically been associated with minority groups in major U.S cities (Leovy 2014). While the relationship between race and crime is a compelling one that merits further research, due to word limit constraints it does not fall within the scope of this thesis- the primary focus of which is partisan polarization on gun control.

major cities were afraid to walk in their own neighborhoods at night (Clark 1993). A 1992 Times/CNN poll reported that 57 percent of suburban residents reported worrying about being a victim of crime in their neighborhoods, while 52 percent believed crime had been steadily increasing in their neighborhoods over the previous five years (McAneny 1993). Overall, the media and public's preoccupation with suburban crime meant that many suburban representatives (in particular those representing districts adjacent to urban areas) faced electoral pressure similar to their urban colleagues to support gun control in order to combat crime.

Rural representatives

Lastly, the lowest percentage of support for gun control by district type came from rural representatives. While an issue of electoral significance for many members of Congress and a priority political issue on a national scale, the salience of the crime issue did not impact every member of Congress in equal measure. While (like urban and suburban rates) the rural violent crime rate had been increasing in the years leading up to the 103rd, rural crime rates were significantly more stable over time, and rural representatives faced comparatively low violent crime rates in their districts compared to their urban and suburban colleagues (see graph 8). Additionally, fear of crime was not (and historically has not been) a priority concern for rural voters (Weisheit et al 1996, Weisheit and Donnermeyer 2000, Ball 2001). In fact, research has shown that urban and rural residents tend to view crime very differently. Urban residents are generally concerned with property and violent crime committed by strangers, rural residents with disorder (noise, speeding, littering) and quarrels amongst family and neighbors (Galliher, Donovan and Adams 1975, Weisheit and Donnermeyer 2000).

Rural areas have also historically tended to have high levels of gun ownership; scholars have attributed this to a rural gun culture where hunting, gun collecting, and sport shooting are popular and revered past times (Wright, Rossi, and Daly 1983, Melzer 2009). In Congressman (and anti-control Democrat of the 103rd) Bart Stupak's rural Michigan district, the first official day of the hunting season was a school holiday (Eilperin 1999). While state gun ownership records are not publicly available, survey data exists which indicates that there is a pronounced divide in gun ownership levels between urban and rural dwellers. No survey data on gun ownership by area is available for the timeframe of the 103rd Congress, but in 2013, individuals living in rural areas (across all regions) were twice as likely as those living

in urban areas to own a gun (Pew).[9] Polling data has also shown rural voters to be the least supportive of gun control compared to urban and suburban voters (Pew).[10] Thus with relatively low rates of violent crime, constituents that were not largely concerned about crime, and a rural gun culture which bred high percentages of gun ownership in their districts, rural legislators had little electoral incentive to vote in favor of gun control during this period.

District type: Conclusions

As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, with district type divides in gun control voting present within each party during the 103rd Congress and beyond, district type is a key variable relevant for understanding gun control voting in the House. As will become evident, over time district type divides would cease to be significant as the parties became hyper polarized on the issue; the ways in which electoral pressures and incentives related to district type for party members changed (or didn't change) is critical for understanding the party shifts in the decades since the 103rd Congress.

Variable 3: Region

As with district type, region[11] is a key variable relevant for understanding Congressional voting on gun control, with regional divides in roll call voting historically present in both parties.

Region and gun culture

Region is a particularly significant variable for understanding Congressional gun control voting because there is compelling evidence to suggest that the regions differ in respect to gun ownership and gun culture. For example, there is an extensive academic

[9] The Pew organization found that 59 percent of rural residents reported owning a gun, compared to 28 percent of urban residents and 36 percent of suburban residents ('Gun ownership by area type.' *Pew.* March 2013).
[10] Since the Pew Research Center began polling urban, suburban, and rural voters on their general support for stricter gun controls beginning in 2003, urban voters have consistently been the most supportive, followed by suburban voters, with rural voters being the least supportive of the three groups ('Gun rights versus gun control.' *Pew*).
[11] Throughout the thesis, I have divided the fifty states into four regions as designated by the U.S Census Bureau. The **Northeast** comprises the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania; the **South** comprises the states of Delaware, Maryland, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. The **Midwest** comprises the states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota; and the **West** comprises the states of Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming, California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and Hawaii.

literature focusing on the South's unique relationship with guns, as numerous scholars have sought to understand why the South has consistently been the region with the highest levels of gun ownership and lowest levels of public support for gun controls. Brennan, Lizotte, and McDowall (1993) determined that "a cultural component, related to 'Southernness,' may affect Southern attitudes against gun control" (305). Tonso (1982) argued that firearms (and particularly shotguns) have historically played such a major role in southern farming and hunting tradition that for many, guns have become a symbol of southern culture, while Lizotte and Bordua (1980) similarly argue that there is a southern sporting subculture, where hunting, gun collecting, and sport shooting are dominant. Others contend that high gun ownership and high gun violence rates are the product of a southern subculture of violence bred during the Civil War era which created a culture quick to use firearms when dealing with perceived aggressions (Hackney 1969, Dixon and Lizotte 1987). Taking into account the findings of this body of literature, one can infer that Congressional representatives of the South are in a unique position compared to representatives of other regions- the backdrop to their gun control voting decisions an environment in which gun culture is deeply entrenched.

The North/South Divide: Gun ownership levels and public support for gun control

That Congressional members across regions did not share the same set of circumstances is supported by polling data on both gun ownership levels and public support for gun control by region. Historically, the most stark differences have been between the Northeast and the South, thus the North/South divide will be the focus of this section. While no government data on gun ownership is publicly available, polling organizations such as The Pew Research Center and Gallup have surveyed gun owners by region. On average, the highest levels of reported gun ownership in the United States have come from the South and the lowest levels from the Northeast (with the Midwest and the West switching between the second and third positions).[12] This gun ownership evidence lines up inversely with public support for gun controls by region. Between December 1993 and July 2018, the Pew Research Center has consistently found the region with the greatest percentage of public support for gun control to be the Northeast, and the lowest, the South (with the Midwest and

[12] While coming up with slightly different numbers, both Pew and Gallup have consistently found that the region with the greatest percentage of gun ownership is the South, and the lowest percentage the Northeast (with the West and Midwest occasionally switching the second and third positions)(Saad 2011, Jones 2013). No data from the timeframe of the 103rd Congress is available, but for example in 2003 (the first year they began polling on this question), Gallup reported that 52 percent of individuals in the South owned a firearm, compared to 46 percent in the Midwest, 43 percent in the West, and 29 percent in the Northeast (Saad 2011).

West being more variable, switching between the second and third positions at various points over time) ("Gun rights versus gun control." Pew 2018). Lastly, the South has historically been the region with the strongest NRA membership levels, and the Northeast the lowest (Gray Davidson, 1999, 63). With gun ownership levels, NRA membership levels, and public support for gun control varying significantly across regions, it follows that not every Congressional representative faced the same electoral pressures or shared the same electoral incentives when it came to voting on gun control.

Second dimension DW-nominate

While regional differences in Congressional voting patterns are themselves indicative of its relevance, the importance of region for gun control support is corroborated by the second dimension of DW-nominate. As discussed in the methods section (refer to page 15), the second dimension of DW-nominate (which was primarily developed to pick up inter-party divides on racial issues in the 19th century) has also been useful in picking up divides on issues such as gun control where regional considerations factor into voting (Poole and Rosenthal, 2007, 42). As will be demonstrated, this dimension is particularly useful for picking up inter-party divides within the Democratic party on gun control votes (for reasons which will be discussed).

Beyond region: State gun ownership levels

While the thesis has focused on analyzing and tracking regional trends in Congressional gun control voting over time, it is worth noting that using region as the focal point of analysis can obscure state level differences within regions. For example, while the South has historically been the region with the highest gun ownership levels, the three individual states with the highest levels using the closest available data to the 103rd Congress[13] were Wyoming, Montana, and Alaska- all of which were located in the West (although 8 of the 15 states with the highest gun ownership levels were located in the South- see table 2 below). While regional differences in gun control voting patterns will be the primary focus of analysis throughout the thesis, state level analysis will also be included, particularly when discussing the voting decisions of individual members of Congress.

[13] The closest gun ownership data by state available near the timeframe of the 103rd Congress that this author could find was from a study of gun ownership levels violent crime rates published in 2002 by the American Academy of Pediatrics (Timmons 2015).

Table 2: States with the highest gun ownership levels

State	Percentage of Households that own a gun	Region
Wyoming	62.8	West
Montana	61.4	West
Alaska	60.6	West
South Dakota	59.9	Midwest
Arkansas	58.3	South
West Virginia	57.9	South
Alabama	57.2	South
Idaho	56.8	West
Mississippi	54.3	South
North Dakota	54.2	Midwest
Kentucky	48	South
Tennessee	46.4	South
Louisiana	45.6	South
Vermont	45.5	Northeast
South Carolina	45.3	South

Region: Conclusions

Overall, region is a key variable influencing and relevant for understanding Congressional voting on gun control. As will be demonstrated later in the thesis, one of the key partisan asymmetries involving gun control today involves region, as regional considerations have become less significant for Republicans over time but remain a critical variable impacting Democratic voting. How regional considerations have changed over time and how the salience of crime and district type variables discussed prior impacted or related to region will be explicated in later chapters.

Variable 4: Gun issue interest groups

A final variable worth discussing is gun issue interest groups and the role they play in the Congressional gun control debate. Over time, both politicians and the news media have perpetuated the notion that the pro-gun rights organization the National Rifle Association has a stranglehold on the gun debate, using campaign donations to compel members of Congress to oppose gun control while successfully mobilizing their membership of single issue voters to defeat gun control proponents at the polls. Yet does this depiction of the NRA's political power stand up to academic scrutiny? Before addressing this question, the following section will first consider the nature of the relationship between the political parties and gun issue interest groups during the timeframe of the 103rd Congress.

Part I: The National Rifle Association and The Brady Campaign[14]

The pro-gun rights side: The National Rifle Association

The National Rifle Association was founded in 1871 by a group of National Guardsman and retired New York Army Officers, not as a gun rights lobbying group but as a marksmanship organization with the purpose of "turning the Guard into sharpshooters and providing for military preparedness" (Gray Davidson 1993, 22). Its first president, Civil War general Ambrose Burnside, was concerned about the poor quality of marksmanship he had witnessed amongst Union soldiers during the war (Achenbach 2013). Over time, the NRA shifted from an organization primarily concerned with marksmanship to a broader sport shooting and hunting organization, particularly in the years following the Second World War as returning serviceman with an avid interest in hunting flocked to join, the NRA's membership tripling during this period (Gray Davidson 1993, 21). Yet even with this shift in focus, the NRA remained largely apolitical. In response to the turmoil of the 1960s (and the high profile assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, and Civil Rights activist Martin Luther King Jr.), Congress passed the Gun Control Act of 1968, which amongst its provisions expanded gun license requirements, restricted handgun sales

[14] While there are other gun issue interest groups besides the NRA and the Brady Campaign, these two have been chosen as the focus of interest group analysis because historically they have been the most publicly visible, well financed, and politically active in the gun control debate. On the gun rights side the NRA has no comparable match, while on the pro-control side, the Brady Campaign (under its various titles) has been the longest serving and most publicly prominent, although the organization has been joined in recent years by better funded groups such as Americans for Responsible Solutions and Everytown for Gun Safety, groups which will be discussed in later chapters.

over state lines without going through a licensed dealer, outlawed mail order sales of rifles and shotguns, and increased the list of those prohibited from purchasing guns to include the mentally incompetent and drug users (Spitzer 2012, 132). While the NRA deemed the legislation to be overly restrictive, they did not issue a call to arms amongst their membership; rather, top NRA official Franklin Orth would give "partially favorable" (Spitzer 2012, 133) testimony before Congress in regard to the bill and wrote in the organization's monthly magazine *American Rifleman* that "the measure as a whole appears to be one that the sportsmen of America can live with" (Achenbach 2013, 5).

The NRA's transition to a powerful gun rights lobbying organization began in earnest in the mid-1970s, when an internal factional struggle between "old guard" moderates who wanted the organization's primary focus to remain on sports shooting, hunting, and other recreational purposes and "hard liners" who wanted the organization to take on an increasingly political role came to a head (Gray Davidson 1993, 65). At the NRA's annual convention in Cincinnati in 1977, a group of hardliners staged a coup, taking advantage of the organizations bylaws that allowed members to adopt changes by calling a vote on the convention floor. The old guard board members were deposed and hardliners put in their place, now free to direct the NRA's resources in favor of the political sphere (Gray Davidson 1993, 65). From that point onwards, the NRA established itself as a political organization whose primary goal has been to lobby against gun control legislation and advocate for legislation to protect and strengthen gun rights.

The NRA and the parties

From its earliest days as a political organization, the NRA has gravitated towards the Republican party, who since 1968 had the protection of Second Amendment rights and opposition to gun control enshrined in their party platform. Yet despite this, the organization long considered itself to be above partisan politics. In the late 1980s when Republican leaders expressed anger that the NRA refused to rally behind conservative candidates in several close Congressional races, NRA General Counsel Richard Gardiner responded "look, we're not a conservative organization...we're a pro-gun organization. Most of the time that results in supporting candidates that people would consider conservative. But we do not get involved in anything but the gun issue" (Gray Davidson 1993, 179). Overall, the NRA's primary philosophy has been to endorse and support members of Congress who share their pro-gun

rights stance and oppose those who do not, regardless of an individual's party affiliation. In the late 1980s, almost 40 percent of NRA members identified as Democrats,[15] while some of the NRA's most loyal allies in Congress during this period were anti-control Democrats. This included members who will be discussed in future chapters such as John Dingell (MI-16th) whom the organization called "a stalwart when it comes to the preservation of the rights of hunters, sportsmen and law-abiding gun owners" (NRA-ILA 2002) and Harold Volkmer (MO-9th), who was referred to as "a leader of the movement for firearm rights and a hero to gun owners everywhere" (NRA-ILA 2011). Both men had career A+ ratings from the NRA.

And despite its closer relationship to the Republican party, the NRA had no reservations about targeting Republicans. During the 1992 election cycle, the NRA campaigned against Herbert Bateman (VA-1st), a rural representative who had voted for the Brady bill in 1991. The NRA endorsed his Democratic challenger and sent bumper stickers to members in his district with the phrase "If Bateman wins, you lose," leading his office to receive phone calls from 15,000 disgruntled NRA members threatening to unseat him (Lerman 1992, 1). Another example during this same timeframe was Jim Sensenbrenner (WI-9th), a suburban representative who had also supported the Brady bill. The NRA sent out mailings in his district reading "Hah! With support like that, you might as well have Ted Kennedy representing you," comparing Sensenbrenner to the Massachusetts Senator who had became a vocal gun control advocate after the assassination of his brother John F. Kennedy (Osterlund 1991, 1). While due to the nature of the party positions the NRA had a closer relationship with the Republican party by the 103rd Congress, their general organizational philosophy was simple: support individuals who supported gun rights and oppose those who did not.

The pro-control side: The Brady Campaign

On the opposite side of the gun debate, the oldest and most prominent pro-control organization has been the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, which before 2001 and during the timeframe of the 103rd Congress was known by its previous name- Handgun Control, Inc. Founded as the National Council to Control Handguns in 1974, the group gained political momentum in 1975 when Republican marketing manager Pete Shields,

[15] In 1988, 41 percent of NRA members identified as Democrats, compared to 21 percent who identified as Republican and 39 percent as Independents (Gray Davidson, 1993, 142).

whose son had been killed in a random shooting spree in San Francisco in 1974, took over as Executive Director and began guiding the organization's lobbying efforts (Spitzer 2012, 111). After their initial policy goal to ban the manufacture and sale of cheap handguns failed to come to fruition, the organization shifted its focus in the late 1980s to more achievable aims such as implementing a universal system of background checks.

Similarly to the NRA, while Handgun Control, Inc was more closely aligned with the Democratic party due to the nature of the party platform positions, it was also founded as a non-partisan organization; its founding members, including Executive Director Pete Shields, were conservative Republicans (Gray Davidson 1993, 170). Additionally, one of the organization's most prominent faces has been Sarah Brady, a Republican activist and the wife of James Brady, President Ronald Reagan's former press secretary who was seriously wounded in an assassination attempt on the President in 1981. Sarah Brady would be instrumental in leading the organization's pursuit of a background check and waiting period for the purchase of a handgun which would be signed into law as the Brady bill in 1993 (Spitzer 2012, 170). Overall, Handgun Control, Inc/the Brady Campaign would share a similar philosophy with the NRA, endorsing and supporting members of Congress who supported the enactment of gun control irrespective of their party affiliation.

Gun issue interest groups and the parties: Conclusions

The relationship between gun issue interest groups and the parties is an important one which will be analyzed throughout the thesis. As the parties became increasingly polarized on the gun issue as their opposition groups dissolved, these gun groups began to exclusively align with and funnel their resources towards a particular party- the NRA the Republican party and the Brady Campaign the Democratic party. These gun groups were not driving partisan polarization on the issue but responding to it; polarizing alongside the parties was typical interest group behavior during this timeframe, Rosenfeld (2017) noting that such groups were "drawn into the zero sum logic of two party competition, enlisting as soldiers for one or the other major party" (Rosenthal, 2017, 205). As will be seen, the NRA and the Brady Campaign strategically responded to shifting party dynamics, adapting to consolidate their resources in favor of the party most capable (and willing) to aid them in achieving their desired policy outcomes. For overall, the primary goal of these gun issue groups is to effect gun policy, using members of Congress as their instruments to do so. While they cannot be

credited with driving the party shifts, these gun issue groups (and particularly the NRA) have played a critical role in the Congressional gun control debate, and comprehending the partisan gun control politics of today necessitates understanding their respective roles and how they have evolved over time.

Part II: The myth of NRA invincibility

Democratic House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jack Brooks (TX-9th) was a 42-year veteran of the House of Representatives when he lost his 1994 reelection campaign to a Republican challenger. One of the National Rifle Association's oldest and most loyal allies in Congress, Brooks found that the organization had turned against him when they endorsed his Republican opponent and sent direct mailings to NRA members in his district attacking him. His offense? A yes vote for the 1994 omnibus crime bill, which had contained within it an amendment banning assault weapons (although the anti-control Brooks had voted against both the ban and the Brady background checks bill during that Congress). Both politicians and political pundits attributed the shocking defeat of one of the longest serving members of the House to the NRA's campaign attacks against him (Feldman 2009). And while it is unlikely that the NRA's opposition was the decisive factor behind his loss (for reasons which will be discussed), the belief amongst Congressional members that the group could single handedly bring about the defeat of a veteran House member like Brooks was widespread.

The National Rifle Association has long benefited from what Gray Davidson (1993) termed a 'myth of invincibility;' a commonly held perception that the organization has been able to control the gun debate by purchasing votes and influencing election outcomes. While this myth has been perpetuated by the news media and politicians, it has not held up to academic scrutiny. Yet critically, in terms of influencing Congressional behavior, whether the NRA truly has these aforementioned abilities is less important than the widespread belief that it does. Because of this, the NRA's myth of invincibility is key to understanding the Congressional gun control debate, even if academics have cast doubt on the contentions behind it.

Myth #1: The purchasing of votes

Of the gun groups, the financial clout of the NRA is unparalleled- the organization historically far outspending other groups including its main political rival Handgun Control, Inc/the Brady Campaign.[16] One of the two main suppositions about the NRA's political power which has been discounted by academics is that the organization 'purchases' the votes of Congressional members. Amongst interest group scholars, there is a general consensus that campaign contributions to individual candidates can rarely be tied to the purchasing of votes, and that such contributions mainly serve as a reinforcement of existing loyalties, and in some cases may solidify interest group access to the legislator (Sorauf 1988, Gerber 1999, Baumgartner et al 2009). If interest group money does come into play, it is usually when the issue being voted on is 'low visibility' (i.e. has no impact on the legislator's constituents) (Langbein and Lotwis 1990). In the NRA's case, it is also evident that the money given to individual candidates is usually a fraction of the total amount raised for their campaign. For example, Texas Senator Ted Cruz received $10,150 from the NRA's Political Action Committee (PAC) during his 2012 election campaign, a campaign which overall raised 14 million for the Senator. That this $10,150 'bought' Cruz's vote on any gun control legislation is improbable.

Myth #2: The NRA directly influences election outcomes

Unpacking the second supposition of the NRA's myth (that the organization plays a decisive role in influencing election outcomes) is more complicated, for what the NRA spares in individual campaign contributions it makes up for in other kinds of election spending; mainly for lobbying activities including direct mailings to members and independent expenditures (such as television commercials or other ads endorsing or attacking a political candidate). In 1994, the NRA spent $28.3 million on lobbying and election related activities, a number which has continued to rise over the years (the organization spending over $54 million in 2016)(The Center for Responsive Politics, 2017). And while the NRA is by no means the wealthiest special interest organization in the country, it is unique in how it

[16] For example, during the 1994 election cycle which occurred at the end of the 103rd Congress, Handgun Control, Inc spent $220,000 on Congressional campaigns, compared to the NRA's $2.3 million (Center for Responsive Politics 2018). The NRA also spent $28.3 million on independent expenditures (such as mailings and television advertising in support for or opposition to candidates) during that campaign cycle, while Handgun Control did not report any independent expenditure spending.

mobilizes its membership for political purposes. As Spitzer (2012) points out, since the late 1970's the NRA has spent more on internal communications and direct mailings to its members than any other interest group (in the 1991-1992 election cycle spending $8.4 million on such mailings)(112).

So to what extent does the NRA influence election outcomes? First, scholars like Gray Davidson (1993) have argued that the NRA's influence has always been 'site specific' (147). The NRA's vocal membership base is concentrated in states of the South and West (the regions which also contain the most rural Congressional districts), so Congressional members representing these areas undoubtedly do face intense pressure from the organization and its members to vote a certain way on gun control in order to stave off campaign attacks-particularly in primaries and off-year elections when voter turnout is low.

However, it still remains unclear to what degree the organization actually influences election outcomes in these particular areas. Studies on interest group influence on the electoral process are varied, with some scholars suggesting these groups have a negligible impact (Key 1952, Latus 1984, Schlozman and Tierney 1986) and others that they have occasional impacts in specific circumstances (Maisel 1993, Hrebenar 1990, Kenny, McBurnett, and Bordua 2004). On NRA influence on electoral outcomes specifically, in a study of the 1994 and 1996 House Congressional elections (the former the election cycle dubbed 'the Republican Revolution,' in which the party took control of both Houses of Congress for the first time in nearly forty years and for which the NRA took partial credit), Kenny, McBurnett, and Bordua (2004) found that NRA endorsements sometimes did have a measurable impact on voting results, but only in very specific circumstances and election cycles. NRA endorsements appeared to aid Republican challengers in 1994 (offering a two percentage point boost), but had no measurable effect on Republican or Democratic incumbents (evidence to suggest Jack Brooks would have lost his reelection campaign without the NRA's help), and had no measurable impact on any of the 1996 races.

They concluded that in election cycles with a number of close races (as in 1994, where twelve races were determined by four percentage points or less), the NRA has the potential to swing a particular election, although Waldman (2012) points out that from 2004 to 2010 (four election cycles) only four of 1,038 races in which the NRA endorsed a candidate were decided by less than four percentage points, suggesting that these

opportunities to swing an election in the House are rare. Furthermore, Jacobson (1996) determined that it was a conglomeration of the controversial legislation of the 103rd under President Clinton (including the failed health care bill, the federal budget, and the omnibus crime bill) which fostered partisan divides and reduced support for Democratic incumbents representing swing districts. Jacobson's findings are indicative of how electoral outcomes are rarely decided by a single issue, no matter how intense, vocal, and well-funded the proponents of that issue may be. In conclusion, while there is some evidence that the NRA has influenced election outcomes in a few specific (and rare) instances, it is evident that claims of their invincibility at the polls have been greatly exaggerated.

The myth of NRA invincibility: Conclusions

Regardless of the true extent of NRA electoral influence, it is the myth of invincibility that lies at the heart of their political power. For as long as sources such as *Fortune Magazine* name the NRA "the most powerful lobby in Washington" (Achenbach 2013, 5) and election defeats are attributed to NRA campaigning, members of Congress will believe that the NRA can and frequently does influence election outcomes. Those feeling electorally vulnerable over the gun issue will weigh perceived threats from the NRA, and for some, this pressure will be a critical factor influencing their gun control voting. In politics, the perceptions surrounding an issue are often more important in influencing voting behavior than the realities behind that issue. In terms of Congressional gun control voting during the 103rd Congress and beyond, fear of NRA retribution at the polls has plausibly factored into voting decisions, particularly amongst those representing states in the South or rural districts where gun ownership levels are high and NRA membership strong. Overall, while the NRA cannot be credited with driving polarization on the issue, its political clout makes it a key player in the Congressional gun control debate, and thus its role a requisite component of the thesis's polarization story.

Chapter Four: The gun control votes of the 103rd Congress

Speaking in support of the Assault weapons ban during floor debate, Senator Nancy Kassebaum (R:KS) proclaimed that it was "one component of addressing a problem-escalating violent crime" (103rd Cong. Rec. S15376 (1994)). In the House, Marge Roukema (R:NJ-5th) expressed a similar sentiment, telling her colleagues "This debate isn't about hunting or the Second Amendment...This is about crime control and controlling the national epidemic of gun violence" (103rd Cong. Rec. H3090 (1994)). As the gun control floor debates of the 103rd Congress (1993-1994) came to a close, it was evident that the debate centered around the crime issue, and that for many, gun control was viewed as a crucial component of crime control. But would the salience of crime be enough to engender the support necessary to see the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban signed into law?

It is with these gun control debates that the thesis's study of Congressional gun control polarization will commence. This chapter will first analyze the gun control debate rhetoric of the 103rd Congress, demonstrating that amidst a political context where crime rates and public concerns about crime were peaking, gun control was primarily debated in the context of the general crime issue. Following this, the chapter will identify and analyze various trends and party divides in roll call voting. It will explain how the variables discussed in Chapter Three (crime, district type, and region) are relevant for understanding Congressional voting on gun control during this period, their influence fostering both bipartisan support for and opposition to the legislation. As the starting point of the thesis's roll call vote analysis, the material presented here acts as a baseline for comparison of future votes; later chapters will demonstrate how party divides in voting have become less significant over time as each party's minority opposition group has dissolved and the parties have become nearly fully polarized on the issue in the present.

Part I: The debate rhetoric: Gun control as crime control

This chapter will begin with a rhetorical analysis[1] of the gun control debates held in consideration of the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban during the 103rd Congress. To reiterate, the Brady bill mandated a system of federal background checks on firearms

[1] For an explanation of Congressional debate rhetoric analysis in the thesis, refer to page 12.

purchasers and implemented a five-day waiting period for handgun purchases, while the Assault weapons ban prohibited the manufacture of nineteen types of semi-automatic firearms and large capacity ammunition magazines (holding more than ten rounds) for civilian use.[2] This rhetorical analysis will corroborate the argument established in Chapter Three that the crime and gun control issues were intertwined during this period by demonstrating that gun control was primarily debated in the context of crime.

Support for gun control

Rhetoric: Graphic imagery

The most striking crime related rhetoric used in the gun control debates of the 103rd Congress invoked gun violence in graphic terms. For example, Senator Dianne Feinstein (D:CA) and representative Marge Roukema (R:NJ-5th) both compared gun violence in America to war, Feinstein telling the Senate "The harsh reality is semiautomatic assault weapons are turning America's streets into war zones" (103rd Cong. Rec. S15967 (1993)), while Roukema stated "Today our hospital emergency rooms are MASH units" (103rd Cong. Rec. H3090 (1994)). Representatives James Traficant (D:OH-17th) and Butler Derrick (D:SC-3rd) both suggested that the public's heightened fear of crime was linked to gun violence, the former stating that "We have drive-through, drive-by, and drive-in shootings. Americans are not safe in their own homes" (103rd Cong. Rec. H9093 (1993)), while the latter told the House "It is time to take back our streets from the criminals and to end the carnage that has made us all prisoners of our own fear" (103rd Cong. Rec. H9098 (1993)). By using this type of striking rhetoric, the implication was that gun violence and the crime problem plaguing America were inextricably linked, and that fear of gun violence and fear of crime were entwined. Such rhetoric most often referred to gun violence and crime in general terms (and typically with an urban/inner city implication), focusing on both as nationwide epidemics rather than referring to localized or specific tragedies of gun violence. This focus on the general over the specific would come to personify the gun control debates of this Congress.

[2] For a breakdown of both pieces of legislation and other legislation analyzed in the thesis, refer to Appendix 1.

Argument: Restricting access to firearms will reduce crime rates

Moving beyond the rhetorical devices linking gun violence to the crime epidemic, supporters also argued that the specific gun controls being debated would in fact limit criminal access to guns and reduce crime rates. Several individuals who supported the Brady bill cited the success of similar legislation in their own states. Among them was representative Ben Cardin (D:MD-3rd), who praised a seven-day waiting period enacted in Maryland in 1966 which he reported had prevented over 16,000 firearms purchases from individuals with criminal records. Another was Michael Castle (R: DE-at large), who lauded Delaware's computerized instant background check system, which since its implementation in January of 1991 had prevented 1,150 illegal handgun purchases. For these members the argument was simple: restrict criminal access to firearms and you will reduce crime. As Senator Bill Bradley (D:NJ) argued, "How can anyone say that stopping 10,000 handgun purchases by convicted felons has not made a difference?" (Cong. Rec. S16417 (1993)).

When it came to the proposed ban on assault weapons, many supporters argued that these types of firearms were predominantly the weapon of choice for violent criminals and played a significant role in rising crime rates. Some, such as representatives Constance Morella (R:MD-8th) and Rosa DeLauro (D:CT-3rd) cited FBI statistics that indicated that while assault weapons accounted for less than one percent of privately owned guns in the nation, they were used in a disproportionate amount of all violent crimes (8.4 percent) in 1993, and were 18 times more likely to kill police than conventional firearms (103rd Cong. Rec. H3090 (1994)). Overall, while the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban were very different forms of gun control legislation, their supporters emphasized that both would restrict criminal access to firearms, and in doing so, had the potential to substantially reduce crime rates.

Rhetoric: Support for law enforcement

The Brady Bill and the Assault weapons ban had both received law enforcement support, with numerous agencies, including The Fraternal Order of Police, the National Sheriffs Association, the Police Executive Research Forum, and the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association flooding members of Congress with testimony in support of the legislation. Seeing the utility of aligning themselves with those who were working on the front lines in the fight against crime, many chose to cite law enforcement support as one

of their primary reasons for voting in favor of gun control. For, many argued, how could one be 'tough on crime' if they were ignoring the pleas of those fighting to instill law and order on America's streets? Michael Castle (R: DE-at large) would tell his colleagues "Our law enforcement officers are strongly for this piece of legislation (the assault weapons ban), and I think that is very, very significant. They are the ones who are on the firing line, and they are the ones who are saying 'Do something to help protect us'" (103rd Cong. Rec. H3081 (1994)). Senator Dennis DeConcini (D:AZ), a formerly anti-control Democrat who was once named 'legislator of the month' by the NRA, told members of the Senate "After I spoke with members of law enforcement, I determined that something had to be done about these assault weapons...I went ahead because law enforcement in Arizona and around this country told me time and time again that this is dangerous; it is killing their members, as well as the public (103rd Cong. Rec. S15522 (1994)).

Citing law enforcement support appeared to be a particularly popular rhetorical tactic for conservative Republicans who supported gun controls, such as Michael Oxley (OH-4th) who stated during the debate "I for one, who have a background in law enforcement, am tired of seeing on the news police officers killed in the line of duty. Support the Brady bill" (103rd Cong. Rec. H9105 (1994)). Pete Hoekstra (MI-2nd), who was one of the most conservative members of Congress at the time,[3] justified his support for the Brady bill by telling the House "More than 80 percent of the law enforcement officials from my district--the county sheriffs, the chiefs of police, and the county prosecutor's-support the Brady bill" (103rd Cong. Rec. H9112 (1994)). While it may have been the case that members of Congress were convinced by police testimony to support gun control, citing the need to protect law enforcement also provided a principled justification that would be difficult for even the most ardent anti-controllers to publicly criticize.

Opposition to gun control

On the opposite side of the debate, members were just as adamant that they had the solution to combating crime. Unlike pro-control rhetoric, anti-control rhetoric was devoid of graphic imagery, and there was no mention of law enforcement officers being gunned down in the line of duty. Rather, the approach of those opposed to gun control was simple: attack

[3] Pete Hoekstra had a DW-nominate score of .687, the 11th highest (or most conservative) of this Congress.

claims that the gun control laws being proposed would successfully reduce crime rates, and then propose an alternative 'tough on crime' approach.

Rhetoric: Gun control as symbolism

One of the most widely used arguments was that gun control was merely symbolic, for criminals obtain their firearms through illegal means and do not follow gun control laws, leaving law abiding gun owners to bear the brunt of the legislation, which imposed restrictions on their Second Amendment rights. As Jack Brooks, (D: TX-9th) (speaking about the Brady bill) told the House "The main market for the purchase and sale of such weapons is the illicit market...We are deluding ourselves and the citizens of this country if we attempt to paint this bill as the answer to violent crime or even to the proliferation of handguns" (Cong. Rec. H9101 (1993)). Senators Larry Craig (R:ID) and Patrick Leahy (D:VT) agreed, Craig calling the Brady bill "A shell" (103rd Cong. Rec. S16309 (1993)) while Leahy told his colleagues "Let us face it, as a matter of policy, Brady is a symbol...there is no waiting period, as we know, for criminals" ((103rd Cong. Rec. S16330 (1993)). The efficacy of an assault weapons ban was also called into question; Joe Knollenberg (R:MI-9th) called it "Petty symbolism at its worst" while Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R:FL-21st) claimed it was, "window dressing that should be defeated" (103rd Cong. Rec. H3068 (1994)). Senator Larry Pressler (R: SD) perhaps summed up this symbolism argument best, stating that "Congress will pass them (gun controls) only because they create the appearance of being tough on crime" (103rd Cong. Rec. S16670 (1993)).

Argument: Be tougher on criminals, not guns

Having equated gun control policy with symbolic politics, its opponents went on to argue that truly being 'tough on crime' and taking steps to address the crime problem did not involve being tough on guns. Rather, as Senator Bob Smith (R:NH) stated, "We need to control crime by cracking down on criminals, not guns" (103rd Cong. Rec. S16319 (1993)). The phrase "Guns do not kill-people do" (Cong. Rec. 9108 (1993)) was one of the most popular rhetorical refrains, putting the blame on the individual criminal actor rather than the firearms used to perpetuate the crime.

To crack down on the criminals themselves, many argued for stiffer penalties for those caught using a firearm in the commission of a crime. Senator Slade Gorton (R:WA)

called for tougher sentencing laws instead of banning assault weapons outright, telling the Senate "We must have the courage to pass and enforce measures which will...put violent offenders away for life and make gang members think twice before picking up a firearm" (103rd Cong. Rec. S15455 (1993)). Jolene Unsoeld (D:WA-3rd) agreed with Gorton, arguing that "We should throw the book at anyone who uses a firearm in the commission of a crime" (103rd Cong. Rec. H3069 (1994)). There was also an effort to emphasize that much of the violent crime plaguing America was due to repeat offending (an argument successfully employed by those behind the 'three strikes' sentencing movement). Bill McCollum (R:FL-5th) suggested Congress should "Take the violent criminal off the street, lock him up, and throw away the key" (103rd Cong. Rec. 9099 (1993)), while Harold Volkmer (D:MO-9th) stated "I believe the leading immediate cause of violent crime is the revolving door of violent criminals in our prisons... convicted criminals are allowed back out on the street, and we all know what happens then" (103rd Cong. Rec. H9089 (1993)).

Arguing that the solution to reducing gun violence and crime nationally could be found in tougher sentencing laws was an apt strategic move in a political era when punitive sentencing laws were favored by the public and frequently enacted by legislators as a policy solution to reducing crime, whether it be drug crime, property crime, or violent crime. In fact, many ardent pro-controllers (such as Senator Dianne Feinstein (D:CA)) also advocated for tougher sentencing for criminals who used firearms in the commission of a crime (Carney 1994). Anti-controllers thus painted gun control as a policy solution that would not work (for criminals don't follow laws) and compared its questionable efficacy to an already frequently implemented, bipartisan policy solution which would punish the criminal offenders who used firearms and prevent them from re-offending. For anti-controllers, addressing gun violence and being 'tough on crime' could be done effectively without passing stricter gun controls.

The debate rhetoric of the 103rd Congress: Conclusions

In conclusion, an analysis of the gun control floor debates of the 103rd Congress make clear that during this period of peaking crime rates and public concerns about crime, gun control was primarily debated in the context of the crime issue. What was also apparent was that the debate itself was bipartisan, with countless members crossing party lines to express support for or opposition to gun control on the House and Senate floor. During these debates, pro-control versus anti-control was not simply Democrat versus Republican. Some

of the most vocal gun control supporters were Republicans and the most fervent opponents Democrats, and one cannot determine what party a member belonged to or whether they identified as a liberal, moderate, or conservative based on their statements during these debates alone. For critically, during this period there was more to understanding Congressional gun control voting than partisanship and political ideology alone.

Part II: Overview: The roll call votes of the 103rd

Despite much contentious debate, the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban would pass successfully in both chambers and be signed into law by president Clinton during the 103rd Congress. Because the Assault weapons ban was considered a stricter form of gun control than the Brady bill, it received less Congressional support than Brady, and the margin of passage was very close. Additionally, while the Democratic party was responsible for agenda setting and maintained majority control of both chambers, the anti-control minority opposition group within the party was large enough that the successful passage of both bills necessitated a degree of Republican support.

Table 1: The Brady bill and Assault weapons ban roll call votes

Legislation	Democrats (House/Senate)	Republicans (House/Senate)	Independents (House/Senate)	Measure of Polarization*
Brady Bill (1993) Passed H: 238-189 Passed S: 63-36	**H**: 184 yes (73%) 69 no (27%) **S:** 47 yes (85%) 8 no (15%)	**H**: 54 yes (31%) 119 no (69%) **S**: 16 yes (36%) 28 no (64%)	**H:** 1 no (100%) **S:** -	**H:** .42 **S:** .49
Assault Weapons ban (1994) Passed H: 216-214 Passed S: 52-48	**H:** 177 yes (70%) 77 no (30%) **S**: 45 yes (83%) 9 no (17%)	**H**: 38 yes (21%) 137 no (78%) **S**:10 yes (23%) 34 no (77%)	**H:** 1 yes (100%) **S**: -	**H:** .49 **S:** .60

*For an explanation of the measure of polarization, refer to the definition section on page 9.

As is evident in the above table, the gun control votes of this Congress were moderately polarized. As was discussed in the Literature review, the shift from relatively non-existent to moderate levels of polarization between 1968 and 1994 can be explained by

the parties establishing divergent platform positions on the issue beginning in 1968 and the process of party realignment which created two ideologically distinct parties by the mid-to-late 1980s (Levendusky 2009, 23). And while the gun control votes of the 103rd were more polarized than previous gun votes, it is worth noting that they were significantly less polarized than other key votes of this Congress, such as on Clinton's budget and voting rights legislation (see table 2 below). And while the near complete polarization seen in the voting over the Voter Registration Act and the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act were not necessarily representative of most votes of this Congress, what is critical to understand is that when it came to certain issues (like balancing the budget and voting rights) the parties were more or less united during the 103rd Congress, while on issues such as gun control, they were far less so.

Table 2: Polarization and significant Congressional votes (1968-1994)

Legislation	Measure of Polarization
Gun Control Act of 1968[4] (vote held before party platform positions established later that year)	**H:** .12 **S:** .14
Firearm Owners Protection Act of 1986[5]	**H:** .38 **S:** .26
Brady Bill (1993)	**H:** .42 **S:** .49
Assault Weapons ban (1994)	**H:** .49 **S:** .60
Voter Registration Act of 1993[6]	**H:** .81 **S:** .88

[4] The Gun Control Act of 1968 expanded gun license requirements, required more thorough record keeping, restricted handgun sales over state lines without going through a licensed dealer, outlawed mail order sales of rifles and shotguns, and increased the list of those prohibited from purchasing guns to include the mentally incompetent and drug users (Spitzer 2012, 132).

[5] The 1986 Firearm Owners Protection Act included provisions both strengthening (banning the sale of machine guns to civilians) and in some cases weakening gun control (reopening interstate sales on some long guns, and removing record keeping requirements for sales of non armour piercing ammunition) (Spitzer 2012, 137).

[6] The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 required state governments to offer voter registration opportunities to eligible individuals applying for or renewing drivers licenses (or public assistance) in an attempt to enhance voter participation.

Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993[7]	**H**: .85 **S:** .90 (no Republicans in the House or Senate voted in favor)

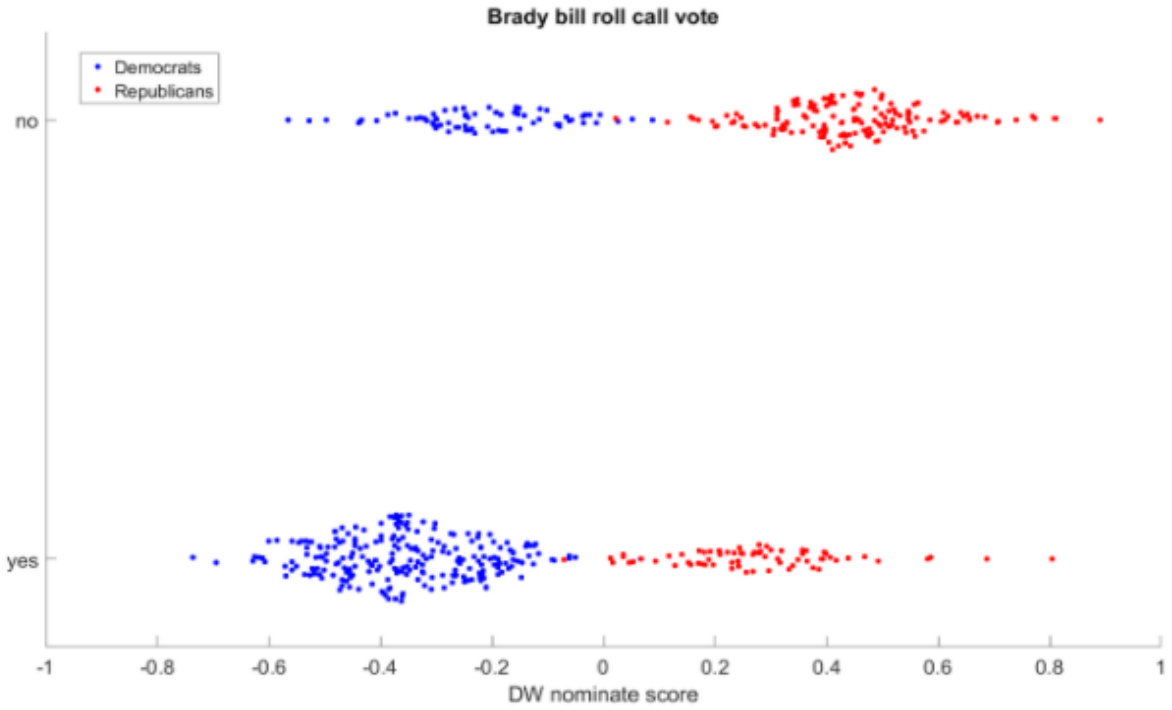
DW-nominate graphs

The following graphs, which have plotted members of the 103rd Congress on an x-axis based on their first dimension DW-nominate scores for that Congress, provide a clearer picture than table 1 of how the parties voted (for a detailed explanation of the use of DW-nominate in the thesis, refer to page 15 of Chapter One). Since there are 100 members of the Senate and 435 members of the House to plot (and many with DW-nominate scores that were within a hundredth of a point of one another), vertical jittering[8] has been applied to these graphs to both allow for maximum visibility of individual data points and to illustrate ranges of DW-nominate density (for example, making it clear graphically that the majority of Republican 'yes' votes for the Brady bill came from representatives with DW-nominate scores between 0.2 and 0.4).

[7] The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 was President Bill Clinton's first budget bill, which proposed to cut spending and increase taxes (on different brackets of high income earners) in order to reduce the budget deficit. Not one Republican in the House or Senate voted in favor of it.

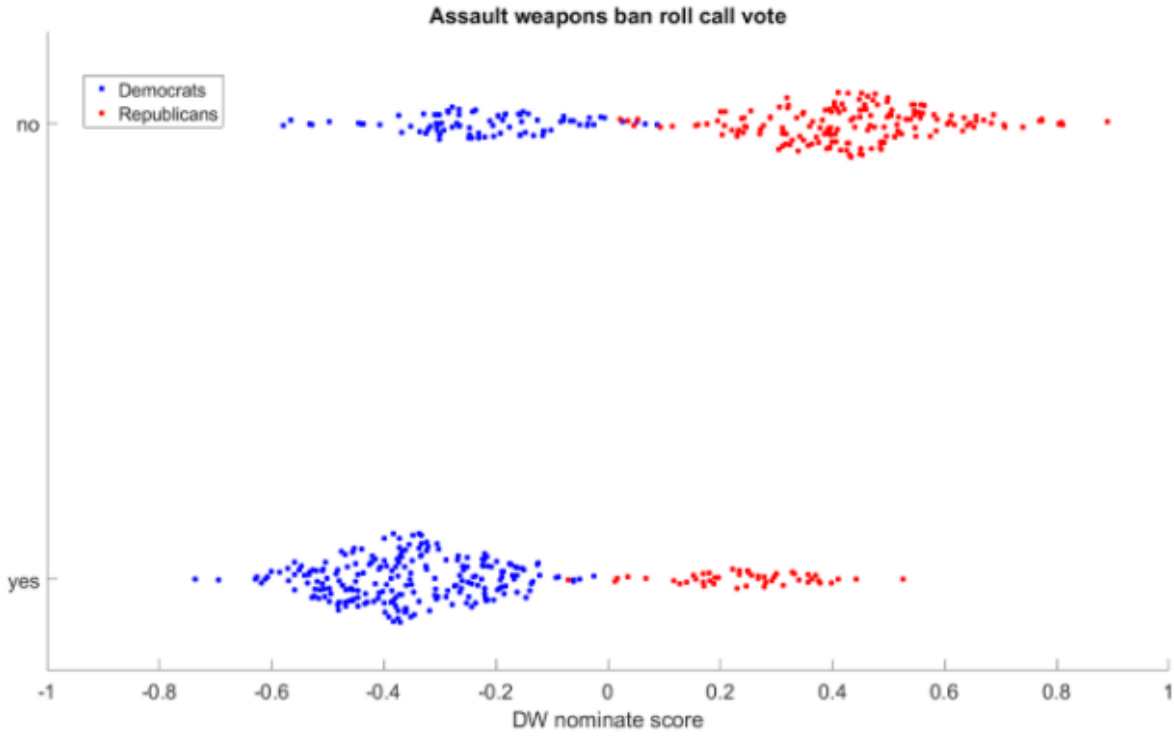
[8] Jittering is a graphing technique that is used when plotting a large number of individual data points. It adds random noise to the data to make the individual points appear distinct from one another and thus more easily visible (Wicklin 2011). In these graphs, the amount of jittering applied is proportional to the density of the area; i.e. where numerous DW-nominate scores were closely clustered together on either x-axis.

Graph 1: The Brady bill roll call votes (House and Senate combined)



Yes: 231 Democrats/70 Republicans
No: 77 Democrats/147 Republicans

Graph 2: The Assault Weapons ban roll call votes (House and Senate combined)



Yes: 222 Democrats/48 Republicans
No: 86 Democrats/171 Republicans

As the above graphs make clear, over two decades into party realignment the parties were significantly ideologically polarized. Only one Republican (Vermont Senator Jim Jeffords) had a DW-nominate score below zero, while only four Democrats (Earl Hutto (FL-1st), Billy Tauzin (LA-3rd), (Gene Taylor (MS-5th), and Ralph Hall (TX-4th)- all of whom were from the South) had scores above zero. In terms of support for gun control, most Republican supporters were among the more moderate members of their party, while Democratic opposition predominantly came from its moderate wing. However, it is also evident (particularly with some of the Republican supporters of the Brady bill that stand out as outliers in the above graph) that there were exceptions to this. Having divided the 103rd Congress into three terciles (liberal/moderate/conservative) based on the DW-nominate scores of its members, a more complete breakdown of the votes[9] is provided in the table below. A detailed explanation of this tercile categorization process and how members of Congress have been classified in the thesis as liberal, moderate, or conservative can be found on page 15 of Chapter One.

Table 3: A breakdown of Democratic voting on gun control

	Democrats voting for both	Democrats just voting for Brady	Democrats just voting for AWB	Democrats voting for neither
Liberal	145 of 178 (81%)*	6 of 178 (3%)	4 of 178 (2%)	22 of 178 liberals (12%)
(most liberal half)	81 of 89 (91%)	1 of 89 (1%)	1 of 89 (1%)	6 of 89 most liberal (7%)
Moderate	65 of 136 (48%)	15 of 136 (11%)	9 of 136 (7%)	47 of 136 (35%)

*percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

[9] Each tercile (liberal/moderate/conservative) contains one third of the members of that Congress. Because the 103rd Congress had significantly more Democrats than Republicans (96 members to be exact) there were a number of Democrats who fell into the second (moderate) tercile. Decades into party realignment and with the 103rd Congress being the most ideologically polarized Congress in history up to that point (Poole and Rosenthal 1997), there were no Democrats who fell within the third (conservative) tercile, and no Republicans who fell within the first (liberal) tercile.

Table 4: A breakdown of Republican voting on gun control

	Republicans voting for neither	Republicans just voting for Brady	Republicans just voting for AWB	Republicans voting for both
Moderate	11 of 43 (26%)	11 of 43 (26%)	1 of 43 (2%)	20 of 43 (47%)
Conservative	128 of 176 (72%)	20 of 176 (11%)	7 of 176 (4%)	18 of 176 (10%)
(most conservative half)	81 of 89 (91%)	7 of 89 (8%)	2 of 89 (2%)	0 of 89 (0)

A breakdown of party voting on gun control: Analysis

Overall, by this point in time the party positions on the gun issue were fixed. The 1992 official Democratic party platform stated "We support a reasonable waiting period to permit background checks for purchases of handguns, as well as assault weapons controls to ban the possession, sale, importation and manufacture of the most deadly assault weapons" (Democratic Party Platform, 1992), while the Republican party platform made clear that it did not support these gun controls, stating "Republicans defend the constitutional right to keep and bear arms" (Republican Party Platform 1992). And while each party's majority adhered to these platform positions, both parties contained active minority opposition groups of members who crossed party lines with their gun control voting.

Perhaps predictably, the greatest percentage of Democratic support for gun control during the 103rd Congress came from the party's liberal contingent, while the greatest percentage of Democratic opposition came from its moderate wing. For Republicans, the greatest percentage of support came from the party's moderate wing, while the greatest percentage of opposition came from its conservative contingent. Yet despite these general trends, it is critical to recognize that there were individuals who, through their votes in favor or in opposition to gun control, notably defied these trends during a Congress that was both known for its partisan hostility and was up to that point in time the most ideologically polarized Congress in history (Poole and Rosenthal 2007). As discussed in the Introduction, one of the reasons gun control polarization cannot be adequately explained by the existing literature is because political ideology and gun issue positions did not always align- during the 103rd, 22 liberals in the Democratic party (including six who were among the most liberal half) voted against both the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban, while there were 18

conservatives in the Republican party who voted for both pieces of legislation (and seven amongst the most conservative half who voted for the Brady bill).

That these individuals (many of whom will be discussed in the following chapters) were willing to cross not only partisan but ideological lines in casting their gun control votes is highly significant, for it indicates that factors were critically influencing Congressional voting on gun control during this era which superseded partisanship and political ideology. While there are many political and electoral incentives to voting the party line (refer to page 42) as will be seen, members of Congress have and will cross it when their personal electoral incentives clash with the position of their party. Having established that there is more to understanding gun control voting during this timeframe than partisanship and political ideology alone, what additional factors fostered both bipartisan support for and opposition to gun control?

Party divides in roll call voting

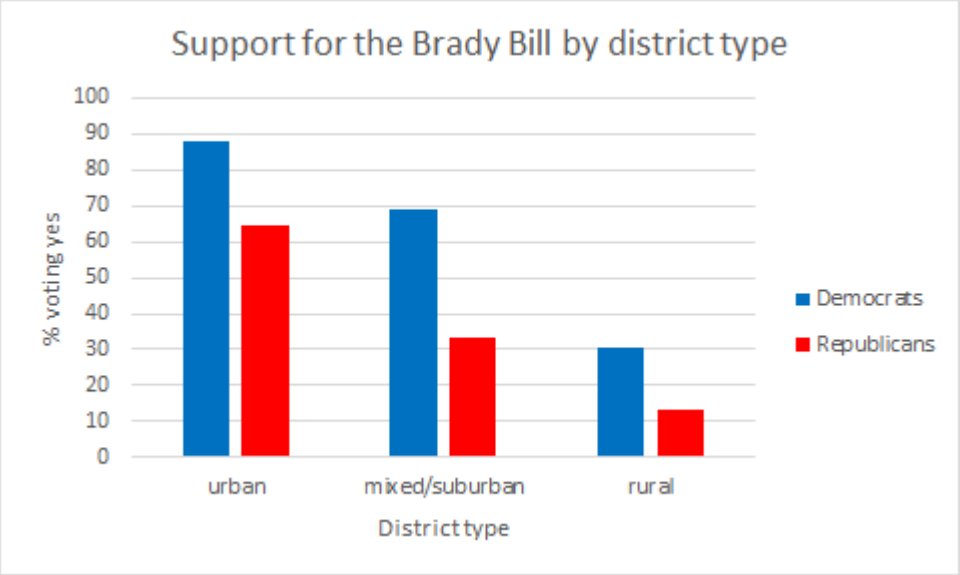
The following sections will identify the divides in roll call voting on the Brady bill and the Assault Weapons ban which were present in both parties, divides which crucially shed light on the electoral pressures and incentives which were influencing Congressional gun control voting during this timeframe. What types of representatives faced electoral pressure to support gun control in order to be viewed as being 'tough on crime'? And in contrast, which representatives had greater electoral incentive to oppose the enactment of gun controls?

Part III: District type[10] divides in the House

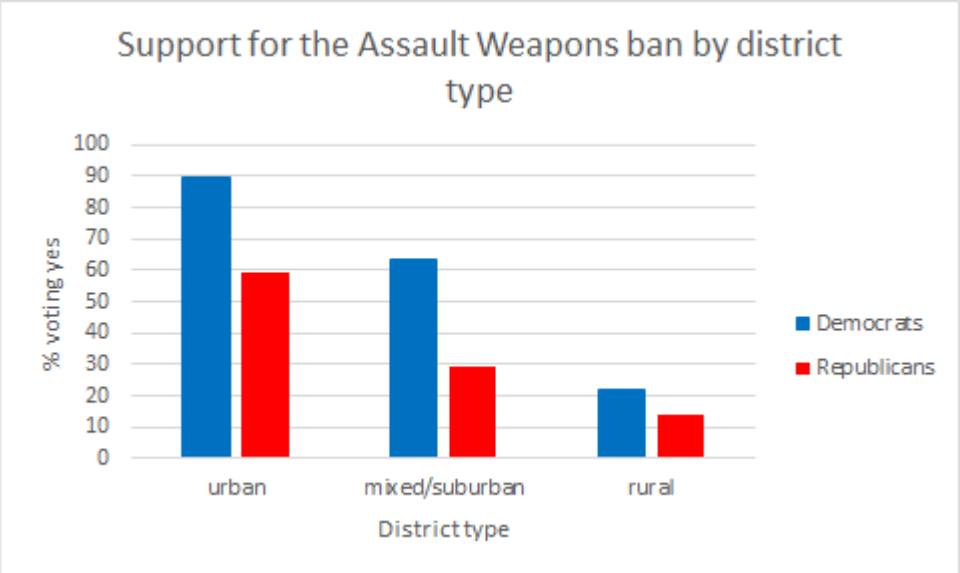
In the House, there were district type divides in voting which were present in both parties, with the most support for gun control coming from urban and the least from rural representatives, with mixed/suburban representatives falling in between the two.

[10] For an explanation of how House Congressional districts were classified in the thesis, refer to page 18.

Graph 3: Support for the Brady bill by district type



Graph 4: Support for the Assault Weapons ban by district type



Urban legislators

Part One of Chapter Three argued that the electoral significance of the crime issue elevated that of gun control for certain members of Congress, who faced pressure to support it to appear 'tough on crime.' Out of all the members of the House, the greatest percentage of support for gun control by district type during the 103rd came from urban representatives. As discussed in the section on urban representatives in Chapter Three (see page 58), urban areas

during this period had higher violent crime rates than the national average (a rate of 774.4 per 100,000 compared to 684.6) and in comparison to suburban and rural areas (774.4 per 100,000 compared to 482.7 and 233.7 respectively)((FBI UCR 1995). Additionally, urban residents reported the highest levels of fear of crime (McAneny 1993, DeFrances and Smith 1994, Ferraro 1995) and highest levels of support for gun control by district type (Igielnik 2017). With higher crime rates in their districts than the national average and with crime rates, public fear of crime, and public support for gun control all peaking in the early 1990s (see graph 6 on page 56) and highest amongst urban residents, the electoral pressure for urban representatives to support gun control during this period was significant.

While most urban representatives during the 103rd Congress were Democrats, there was a contingent of urban Republicans who voted for gun control- their support critically contributing to the bipartisanship on the issue achieved during this Congress. One such example was Steven Horn (CA:38th), a political moderate who voted for both the Brady bill and the Assault Weapons ban despite his office having received 781 threatening phone calls from NRA members (most of whom were not his constituents) in the weeks leading up to the latter vote. Horn's constituents in California's 38th Congressional district (an ethnically and economically diverse district covering portions of southeastern Los Angeles county, where, according to the *Los Angeles Times,* "rising crime had become an obsession" (Mydans 1994, 1)) reported combating local crime to be a priority concern, while 80 percent of respondents to a district poll put out by Horn's staffers expressed support for the Assault weapons ban (Mydans 1994). Despite a barrage of NRA threats, as a Republican representing a competitive urban district (he had defeated his Democratic opponent in 1992 48.6 percent to 43.4 percent) there was major electoral incentive for Horn to cross the party line and support gun control in order to placate his crime concerned constituents.

On the opposite side of the country was Susan Molinari of New York's Staten Island based 13th Congressional district, a representative in a similar position to Horn. Prior to winning the Congressional seat vacated by her father in 1990, Molinari had served on the City Council and had opposed a resolution urging Congress to ban assault weapons, earning her the endorsement of the NRA during her 1990 House campaign. But when Molinari later voiced her support for the Brady bill (legislation which her crime concerned constituents in one of the nation's most high crime cities overwhelmingly supported) the organization publicly attacked her, calling her a turncoat. In response, Molinari stated of the NRA, "They

put a lot of legislators in very untenable positions" (Holmes 1991, 2) and went on to vote for both the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban during the 103rd Congress. For Horn, Molinari, and many other urban Republicans of this Congress who were trying to survive in competitive districts, the electoral pressure to support gun control during this crime concerned era was significant.

Mixed district/suburban legislators

Support for gun control amongst those representing mixed or suburban districts in the House during the 103rd Congress was greater than for rural representatives but less than for urban ones. The likelihood that these representatives (and in particular Republicans) supported gun control was greater if their district was adjacent to an urban area (at least outside of the South). For as was discussed in Chapter Three, while crime rates and public fears about crime were highest in urban areas, throughout the early 1990s, the perception that violent crime was bleeding into the suburbs was widespread. While the news media played a significant role in perpetuating this belief (for examples refer to page 60), the perception of rising suburban crime during this timeframe was not completely without merit. A 1992 report from the Bureau of Justice determined that while violent crime rates in suburban areas had peaked in 1979 (at 34.8 per 1,000), suburban crime had been increasing in the past several years (Bachman 1992). And whether or not crime rates in their areas were actually increasing, suburban residents reported being highly concerned about crime. For example, a 1992 *New York Times*/CNN poll reported that 57 percent of suburban residents reported worrying about being a victim of crime in their neighborhoods, while 52 percent believed crime had been steadily increasing in their neighborhoods over the previous five years (McAneny 1993).

The media and public's preoccupation with suburban crime meant that many suburban representatives (and in particular those adjacent to urban areas) faced similar electoral pressures as their urban colleagues to support gun control in order to combat crime. As a result, there were numerous suburban Republicans who voted in support of gun control during this Congress. One such individual was Jim Sensenbrenner (WI-9th), a conservative (and one of the most conservative members of this Congress[11]) who voiced concern that the

[11] With a DW-nominate score of .804, Sensenbrenner had the 4th highest score of that Congress.

threat of urban crime worried his constituents in the Milwaukee suburbs. Sensenbrenner, a long time supporter of the Brady bill, argued that the bill would "Reclaim our streets and our communities for our families" (Clymer 1991, 1) a line meant to assure concerned voters that passage of the bill would restore safety (or at least the perception of safety) to their suburban communities. Sensenbrenner also stood firm in the wake of NRA threats, the organization punishing him for publicly expressing support for the Brady bill by sending a letter to his constituents that read "Hah! With support like that, you might as well have Ted Kennedy representing you[12]" (Osterlund 1991, 2). Yet despite their best efforts, Sensenbrenner would cast a vote in support of the Brady bill in 1993, responding to the NRA mailings against him by telling a reporter, "They tried to make me out to be a liar, but none of my constituents bought it" (Osterlund 1991, 2).

Another suburban Republican supporter of gun control (and another conservative) was Henry Hyde, whose district (Illinois's 6th) comprised the suburbs of Chicago, a city that in 1992 had the fourth highest violent crime rate (30.3 per 1,000) in the nation (Reardon and Recktenwald 1993). Perhaps best known for the Hyde Amendment (a legislative provision barring federal funding for abortion), Hyde established himself as one of the most vocal pro-controllers of the 103rd Congress. His support for gun control followed both a 1991 *Chicago Tribune* report that violent crime had risen by ten percent in suburban Cook county (parts of which fell within Hyde's Congressional district) (Koziol 1992, 1), and the results of district polling conducted by his staffers which revealed that 74 percent of his constituents supported stronger gun control measures in order to combat rising crime. Hyde cited this polling in justification of his vote in favor of the Assault Weapons ban, stating "It bolstered my opinion that I wasn't off the wall in voting to support this" (Steelye, 7 May 1994). There was also representative Benjamin Gilman (NY-20th), whose district encompassed suburbs north of New York City and who told reporters in 1993 he was convinced to support the "reasonable stopgap measure" that was the Brady bill because of over 3,000 letters he received from constituents expressing concerns over gun related deaths (Idelson 1993, 1). As a final example, there was Los Angeles county suburban representative (and conservative) Elton Gallegly (CA-23rd), who justified his support for the Brady bill by proclaiming, "Criminals

[12] A statement meant to equate Sensenbrenner with Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy, who had become a vociferous supporter of gun control after the assassinations of his brothers, former President John F. Kennedy and former Attorney General and Senator Robert Kennedy.

and their use of firearms is becoming more and more of a problem, the gang killings and so on" (Miller 1991, 2).

Sensenbrenner, Hyde, Gilman, and Gallegly are just a sample of the group of mixed/suburban Republicans who voted for gun control during this Congress, many of whom represented districts in close proximity to urban areas which led them to face similar electoral pressures as their urban colleagues to support gun control as a means of combating crime. However, not all such representatives (particularly, as will be seen, in the South) supported gun control; overall, this type of district was both the most prevalent in the House and the most variable in terms of gun control support. Yet by analyzing the specific circumstances of the representatives who did vote for gun control, critical insight into the factors which influenced their voting (in this case, the electoral salience of crime) can be gleaned.

Rural legislators

The lowest percentage of support for gun control by district type during the 103rd Congress came from rural representatives. For critically, while an issue of electoral significance for many members of Congress and a priority political issue on a national scale, the salience of crime was not a major concern for those representing rural districts. As discussed in Chapter Three, rural representatives faced comparatively low violent crime rates in their districts compared to their urban and suburban colleagues (see graph 8 on page 58), while fear of crime was not (and has not historically been) a priority concern for rural voters (Weisheit et al 1996, Ball 2001). Additionally, rural areas have also historically tended to have the highest levels of gun ownership by district type (Wright, Rossi, and Daly 1983, Melzer 2009), and the lowest levels of support for gun control by district type (Igielnik 2017).

Thus with relatively low rates of violent crime, constituents that were not largely concerned about crime, and high percentages of gun ownership (coupled with low levels of public support for gun control) in their districts, rural legislators had little electoral incentive to vote in favor of gun control during the 103rd Congress. Many of the rural representatives in the House who opposed the gun controls of this Congress were Democrats, such as David Obey (WI-7th), a liberal who represented a heavily forested rural district in northern Wisconsin where, he told reporters, "We look at hunting as a normal recreational experience"

(Clymer 1991, 2). Obey strongly criticized the Brady bill, claiming the waiting period provision would only amount to gun buyers retreating to cities to buy firearms and costing his constituents gun sales. He also opposed the assault weapons ban.

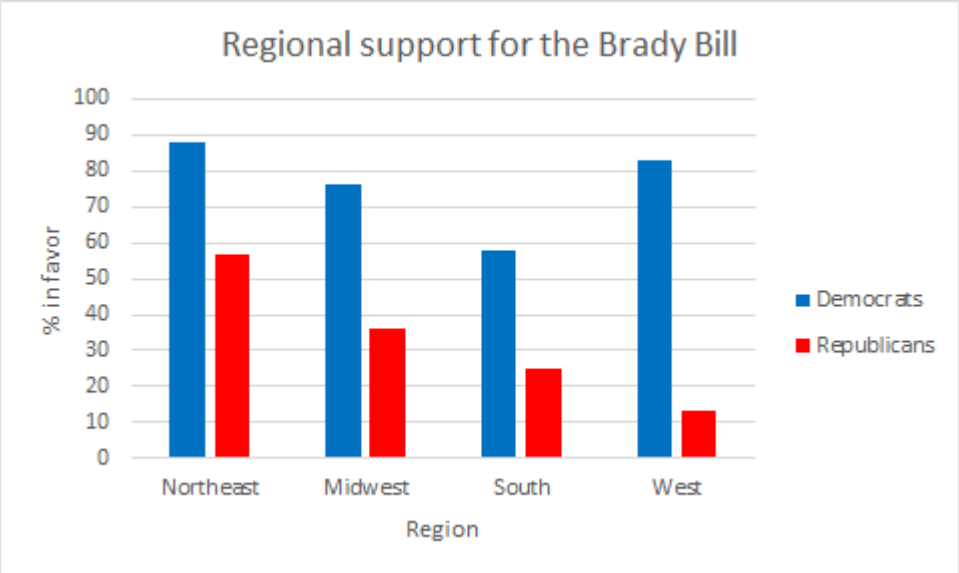
Because of the makeup of their constituencies, rural representatives are particularly susceptible to attacks from the National Rifle Association. NRA membership has historically been strongest in rural areas, their influence "roughly proportional to the size of the rural population" (Gray Davidson 1993, 147). Representative Jolene Unsoeld (WA-3rd) was relatively new to Congress by the 103rd, having been first elected in 1988, defeating her Republican challenger by a slim margin (50.1 percent to 49.9 percent). A liberal Democrat in a competitive rural district with a widespread hunting tradition and a vocal NRA membership base, Unsoeld immediately established herself as an NRA ally and proponent of gun rights, passionately defending the position in Congressional floor debates, grouping the right to bear arms with other basic rights "Such as free speech, free exercise of religion, and a woman's right of choice" (Edel 1999, 468). For rural representatives like Obey and Unsoeld, there was little electoral incentive to support gun control and major electoral pressure to oppose it, irrespective of the preoccupation with crime that was unfolding nationally.

Part IV: Regional divides

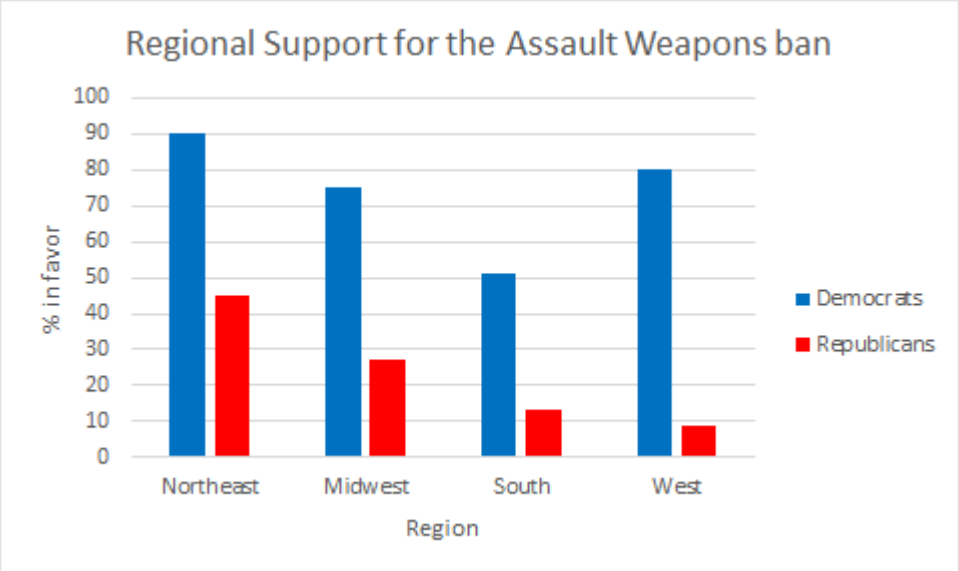
In addition to district type divides in the House, there were also regional divides[13] in party voting on the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban present in both chambers.

[13] For a breakdown of what states are considered within each region, refer to footnote 11 on page 63.

Graph 5: Regional support for the Brady bill (combined House and Senate)



Graph 6: Regional Support for the Assault Weapons ban (combined House and Senate)



Despite the Northeast having the lowest violent crime rate of the four regions during this Congress,[14] the greatest percentage of Congressional support for gun control during the 103rd Congress from both parties came from the Northeast, while the lowest percentage of support from Democrats came from the South (the region with the highest violent crime rate) and from Republicans the West. What explains these regional divides?

As discussed in Chapter Three, regional differences in Congressional support for gun control can be understood in the context of how gun ownership levels and levels of public support for gun control differ by region. To reiterate, historically, the highest levels of reported gun ownership in the United States have on average come from the South and the lowest levels from the Northeast (with the Midwest and the West being more variable, switching between the second and third positions)(Saad 2011, Jones 2013). These gun ownership level rankings line up inversely with public support for gun controls by region, as the region with the greatest percentage of public support on average has been the Northeast, and the lowest, the South (with the Midwest and West switching between the second and third positions at various points over time) (Pew 2017). Additionally, the South has historically been the region with the strongest NRA membership levels and the Northeast the lowest (Gray Davidson, 1999, 63).

Region and crime

With gun ownership levels, NRA membership levels, and public support for gun control varying across regions, it follows that not every representative shared the same electoral incentives when it came to the gun control issue. Removing the electoral relevance of the crime issue during this period from the equation, with the lowest levels of gun ownership, NRA membership levels, and highest levels of public support for gun control by region, Northeastern representatives generally had greater electoral incentive (and faced less electoral risk) to vote in favor of gun control than their Southern colleagues, who faced the highest gun ownership and NRA membership levels and the lowest levels of public support for gun control by region. Bringing crime back into the equation, given these regional considerations it was still the case that many Southerners, such as liberal Democrats and

[14] In 1994 the Northeast had the lowest violent crime rate by region at 17.5 per 100, followed by the Midwest at 20.2 per 100, the West at 24.7 per 100, and the South, with the highest violent crime rate by region, at 37.7 per 100 (FBI Uniform Crime Report 1995). The South also contained the two cities with the highest violent crime rates nationally during this timeframe; Atlanta (40.2 per 1,000) and Miami (38.9 per 1,000).

mixed/urban district representatives Jack Brooks (TX-9th) and Earl Hilliard (AL-7th) were unwilling to support gun control despite the South having the highest violent crime rate by region during this timeframe. Yet overall, given the history and deeply entrenched gun culture of the South (refer to page 63), that any southern representatives, and particularly conservative Republicans like Senators Strom Thurmond (SC) and Kay Hutchison (TX)[15] were voting for gun control is a testament to the electoral salience of the crime issue during this Congress.

Regional differences: Alabama versus New Jersey

While during the 103rd Congress the South was not fully anti-control nor the Northeast fully pro-control, the existence of uniformity in voting patterns in some states serve as a stark illustration of regional differences in Congressional voting on gun control irrespective of district type or party affiliation. For example, in the case of the Southern state of Alabama there was full bipartisan opposition to the gun controls of the 103rd, while in the Northeast state of New Jersey, there was near complete bipartisan support in favor of them.

Table 5: Regional differences in gun control voting by state (Alabama and New Jersey)

Alabama (South)

Name	Party	District type	Brady bill/Assault Weapons ban vote
Sonny Callahan	Republican	mixed/suburban	No/No
Terry Everett	Republican	mixed/suburban	No/No
John Browder	Democrat	rural	No/No
Tom Bevill	Democrat	rural	No/No
Bud Cramer	Democrat	mixed/suburban	No/No
Spencer Bachus	Republican	mixed/suburban	No/No

[15] Both Senators supported the Brady bill during this Congress. Veteran South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, a conservative and long time proponent of 'tough on crime' policies, had shown a willingness to consider gun control as a component of anti-crime legislation years before he cast his vote for the Brady bill in 1993, telling a reporter in 1989 that gun control had the potential to "stop the deadly firepower used by the drug kingpins, hired thugs, and other violent offenders" (Associated Press January 18, 1989). Texas Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison was also a 'tough on crime' proponent, having introduced her own amendment to the crime bill in 1994 that would ban federal prisoners from receiving Pell education grants (Emanuel 2015). Hutchison was up for reelection at the end of the 103rd Congress (1994), facing a pro-control Democratic opponent at the tail end of a Congress where public support for gun control was high and crime was peaking as a priority political issue.

Earl Hilliard	Democrat	urban	No/No
Howell Heflin	Democrat	Senate	No/No
Richard Shelby	Democrat	Senate	No/No

New Jersey (Northeast)

Rob Andrews	Democrat	mixed/suburban	Yes/Yes
William Hughes	Democrat	mixed/suburban	Yes/Yes
Jim Saxton	Republican	mixed/suburban	Yes/Yes
Chris Smith	Republican	urban	Yes/Yes
Marge Roukema	Republican	mixed/suburban	Yes/Yes
Frank Pallone	Democrat	mixed/suburban	Yes/Yes
Bob Franks	Republican	mixed/suburban	Yes/Yes
Herbert Klein	Democrat	urban	Yes/Yes
Robert Toricelli	Democrat	mixed/suburban	Yes/Yes
Donald Payne	Democrat	urban	Yes/Yes
Dean Gallo	Republican	mixed/suburban	Yes/No
Richard Zimmer	Republican	mixed/suburban	Yes/No
Bob Menendez	Democrat	urban	Yes/Yes
Bill Bradley	Democrat	Senate	Yes/Yes
Frank Lautenberg	Democrat	Senate	Yes/Yes

While the regional divides in voting present during the 103rd Congress crucially shed light on the factors influencing gun control voting, not every state went the way of Alabama or New Jersey, making it difficult to completely isolate regional considerations from other factors. In some respects, regional divides are a reflection of district type divides- for example, the Northeast and Midwest (the regions with the greatest percentage of Congressional support for gun control during this Congress) contained a large percentage of the nation's urban districts and several states containing cities with the highest crime rates in the nation (such as New York City, Detroit, and Chicago). Meanwhile, the South and West

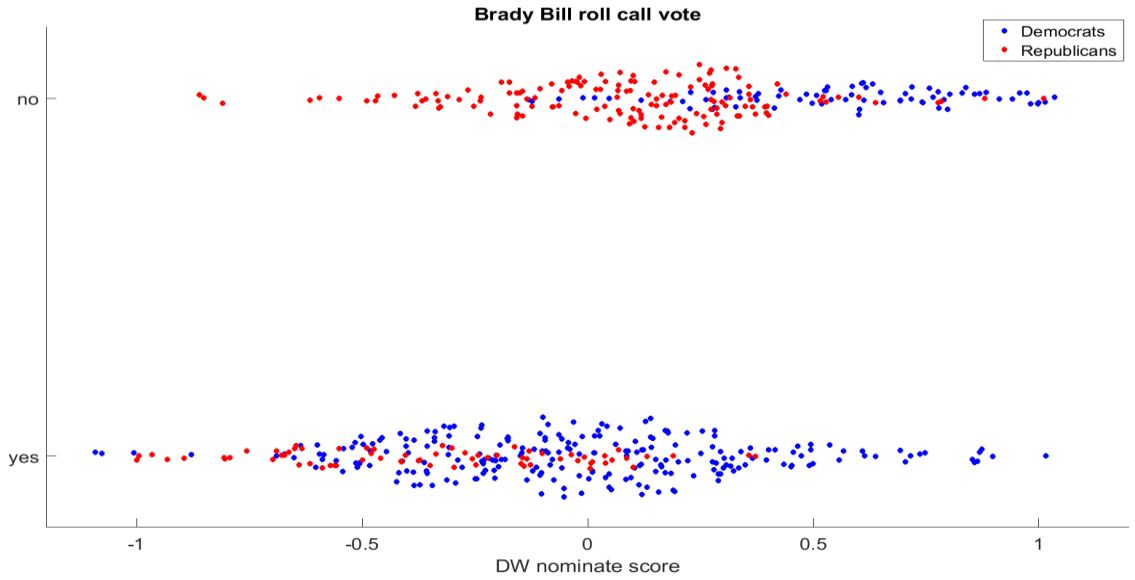
(the regions with the lowest percentage of Democratic and Republican support[16] respectively) contained most of the House's rural districts. Yet overall, considering them alongside district type divides, regional divides in party voting provide crucial insight into the factors shaping Congressional voting on gun control irrespective of partisanship or political ideology.

Second dimension DW-nominate

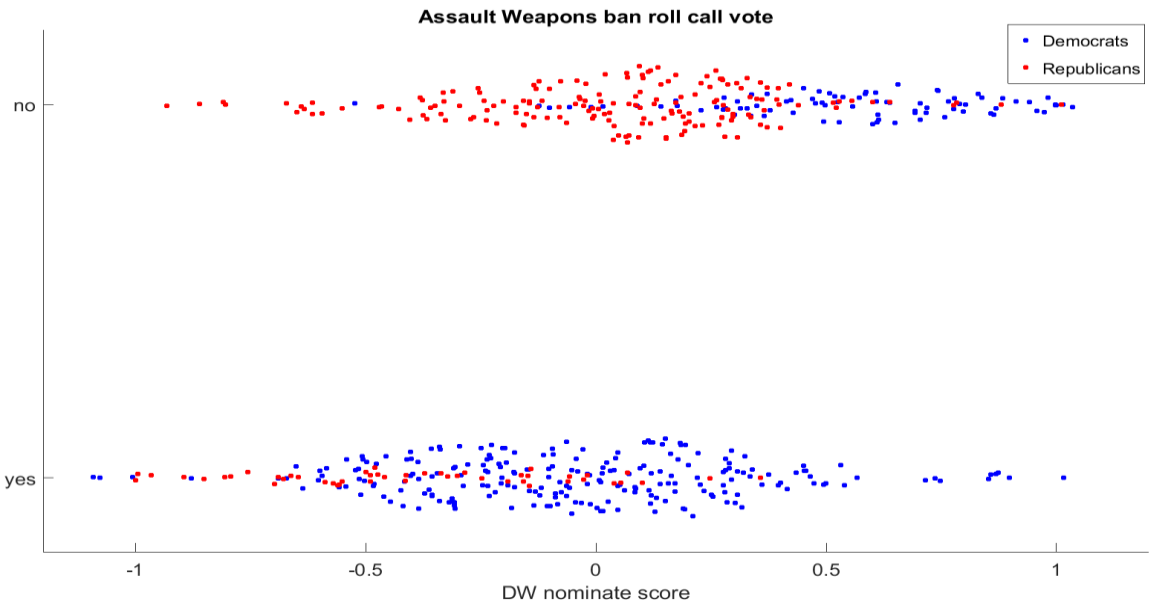
As a final point, while the regional divides in party voting on gun control during the 103rd Congress are themselves indicative of its relevance as a variable impacting gun control voting, the importance of regional considerations for gun control is corroborated by the second dimension of DW-nominate. While the first dimension of DW-nominate plots members on a liberal-conservative scale, the second dimension "picks up divisions within the parties" on issues such as gun control where regional considerations/differences factor into voting (for a more detailed explanation refer to page 15). The below graphs on the Brady bill and Assault weapons ban roll call votes have plotted the members of the 103rd Congress using their second dimension DW-nominate scores, in this case a score closer to -1 indicating weaker and a score closer to 1 indicating stronger regional considerations/ influence in voting.

[16] Outside of California, the majority of both mixed/suburban (not adjacent to urban) and rural districts in the West were held by Republican representatives, which helps to account for the low percentage of Republican support for gun controls from this region during the 103rd Congress. Another key explanation for this was that Western Republicans were concentrated in the Western high gun ownership states.

Graph 7: The Brady bill roll call votes (House and Senate combined)



Graph 8: The Assault Weapons ban roll call votes (House and Senate combined)



In the above graphs, it is evident that this second dimension is particularly relevant for identifying divides within the Democratic party on these gun control votes, as most of the Democrats who crossed party lines to oppose them had scores on the high end of this dimension. For Republicans the dimension appears less significant (which is understandable if electoral pressure related to crime, and not region, was the key variable dividing Republicans) although the majority of Republicans crossing party lines in support of the gun

controls did generally have lower scores than the party majority who opposed them. Overall, while the utility of the second dimension has been questioned in recent years (with Poole and Rosenthal (2007) themselves having determined that this dimension is "in free fall" (315))[17] the above graphs compellingly suggest that regional influences and preferences were a relevant factor in party voting (particularly for Democrats) on gun control during this Congress.

Part V: Cutting across ideology

Thus far, the thesis has argued that a factor unique to the gun control issue is that political ideology and gun issue positions have not always aligned, with liberal Democrats like Dave Obey, Earl Hilliard, Jack Brooks, and Jolene Unsoeld opposing gun control during the 103rd Congress and conservative Republicans such as Strom Thurmond, Henry Hyde, Elton Gallegly, and Jim Sensenbrenner supporting it. Without context and viewed through the lens of today's ideologically and partisan polarized gun control politics, the voting decisions of these members are perplexing. Yet taking into consideration their individual political circumstances during this Congress (for example, Henry Hyde representing a suburban district adjacent to one of the nation's most high crime cities at a time when crime rates and public crime concerns were peaking, versus Jolene Unsoeld, who represented a rural district with low crime rates, high gun ownership levels, and a strong NRA membership presence) the electoral pressures and incentives they faced, and in turn their voting decisions, become intelligible. Overall, for each party, there was one key variable which superseded political ideology when it came to gun voting- for liberals, it was location (region/rural district type), while for conservatives it was crime.

Liberals and region/rural districts

The key variable relevant for understanding why there were liberal Democrats opposed to gun control during the 103rd Congress is their location, and specifically their regional location or district type. The importance of regional influence is particularly evident when utilizing the second dimension of DW-nominate; as is evident in the graphs on page 99, the Democrats who opposed gun control tended to score high on this dimension (indicating a

[17] Today, the second dimension of DW-nominate is no longer considered relevant, for Poole and Rosenthal (2007) argue that the first dimension has largely absorbed the second because most voting has come to divide along straight liberal/conservative lines.

greater regional influence in voting). Additionally, the lowest levels of Democratic support for gun control came from rural district representatives, who had little electoral incentive to support gun control irrespective of their political ideology. Overall, during this Congress there was a group of anti-control Democrats who, besides their gun control voting, otherwise had a liberal voting record- their first dimension DW-nominate scores (which place them on a liberal to conservative scale) significantly lower than their second dimension ones (which place them on a weaker to greater regional influence in voting scale), as is evident in the table below.

Table 6: A sample of liberal anti-control Democrats of the 103rd Congress

Name	District type/Region	1st dimension DW-nominate (liberal/mod/conserv)	2nd dimension DW-nominate (low/med/high regional influence)
Nick Rahall (WV-3rd)	**rural** (**South**)	-.300 (1st, liberal)	.525 (3rd, high)
Jack Brooks (TX-9th)	mixed/suburban (**South**)	-.439 (1st, liberal)	.741 (3rd, high)
Earl Hilliard (AL-7th)	mixed/suburban (**South**)	-.565 (1st, liberal)	.498 (3rd, high)
Dave Obey (WI-7th)	**rural** (Midwest)	-.436 (1st, liberal)	.015 (2nd, moderate)
Jolene Unsoeld (WA-3rd)	**rural** (West)	-.496 (1st, liberal)	-.01 (2nd, moderate)
Jim Oberstar (MN-8th)	**rural** (Midwest)	-.528 (1st, liberal)	.379 (3rd, high)

Conservatives and crime

The key variable relevant for understanding why there was support for gun control from conservatives was the electoral salience of crime. By the early 1990s, being 'tough on crime' had become "a core part of what it meant to be a conservative" (Dagan and Teles 2016, 18), and some conservatives (particularly urban, suburban adjacent to urban, and representatives of states with large urban areas) came to determine that supporting gun control (whether most forms or specific proposals such as background checks legislation, which had the greatest percentage of conservative support) was an electorally valuable or

necessary component of their tough on crime position. And these conservatives were not afraid to be vocal- many extolling their support as a 'common sense' approach to combating crime. For example, Michael Oxley (OH-4th) referred to the Brady bill as a "commonsense approach" and urged members of the House to "Support the Brady bill. It makes common sense. It gets us off the honor system in terms of sales to convicted felons" (103rd Cong. Rec. 9099 (1993)). Similarly, James Sensenbrenner (WI-5th) repeatedly told his colleagues that the Brady bill was a "common sense" and "eminently reasonable" piece of legislation which needed to be passed immediately to curb criminal access to firearms (103rd Cong. Rec. H9101 (1993)). In a 1996 televised campaign ad in support of his candidacy for the Republican nomination for president, Indiana Senator Richard Lugar touted his support for the Assault weapons ban, stating that "being a conservative doesn't mean you have to lose your common sense" ("Dick Lugar for President" Campaign ad, 1996. YouTube.com). And these 'common sense conservatives' for gun control were backed by the "father of conservatism" (Tygiel 2004) himself, former president Ronald Reagan, who had publicly endorsed both the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban in op-eds for *The New York Times* (Easton 1994, 2).

The interconnected relationship between the crime and gun control issues and how the salience of the former elevated the electoral significance of the latter for certain conservatives is a factor unique to the gun control issue; the tough on crime political climate fostered 'common sense' conservatives for gun control when there were no such groups for other traditionally non conservative issue positions (for example no 'common sense' conservatives for abortion or higher taxes). As with the liberal Democratic anti-controllers, for many conservative gun control supporters (such as Jim Sensenbrenner and future Tea Party founder Pete Hoekstra, who had some of the highest DW-nominate scores in their party) their support was a deviation from an otherwise consistently conservative voting record.

Part VI: Outliers

While no one (aside from the individual themselves) can ever be certain as to why a member of Congress voted on gun control the way they did, in many cases, a plausible explanation can be formed. For some representatives of the 103rd Congress, their voting decisions appear relatively straightforward- a Democrat representing an urban district in Manhattan surprises few when they vote in favor of gun control, likewise when a Republican

representing a rural district in Mississippi votes against it. Yet the voting choices of some individuals defy trends and analytical expectation- when it comes to the gun control issue, they are outliers.

Take, for example, Republican Herbert Bateman, who represented Virginia's 1st Congressional district- a conservative rural district in the South which contained a military base. Bateman voted for both the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban despite having faced intense campaign attacks from both the NRA and his anti-control Democratic opponent during the 1992 election cycle; he had also received a barrage of letters and phone calls from 15,000 vocal NRA members in his district threatening to unseat him (Lerman 1992). And while he did win his 1992 reelection bid comfortably (57.6 percent to his opponents 38.7 percent), his 1990 reelection victory over the same opponent (anti-control Democrat Andrew Fox) was a close one (51 percent to 49 percent). As a Republican representing a rural Southern district with a vocal NRA membership (and with the NRA actively campaigning against him), it would be reasonable to expect that Bateman would oppose the gun controls of the 103rd. Yet he stood firm in his support for gun control, telling reporters, "The NRA tried to make an example out of me...In my case, they failed" (Fiske 1993, 1).

Another example of an outlier when it came to gun control was John Dingell, a liberal Democrat representing Michigan's 16th Congressional district, most of which covered Dearborn, a city within the Detroit metropolitan area that was about nine miles from Detroit itself. Like many of the anti-control Democrats discussed in this chapter, Dingell (who had been serving in the House for almost 40 years by the 103rd Congress) had a liberal voting record when it came to most issues- he was a longtime supporter of organized labor, civil rights, and social welfare policy, even introducing a bill providing for a national single payer healthcare system at the beginning of each Congress. But Dingell, an avid hunter and shooter, was also a fierce opponent of gun control, consistently earning an A+ rating from the NRA throughout his career. The organization praised him as a "stalwart when it comes to the preservation of the rights of hunters, sportsmen and law-abiding gun owners," and further stated "We are proud of our sustained relationship with this distinguished gentleman" (NRA-ILA 2002). As a liberal Democrat representing a mixed but primarily urban district a stone's throw from one of America's most high crime cities, one could have reasonably expected Dingell to vote for the gun controls of this Congress. Yet Dingell remained firm in his opposition, voting against both the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban.

Bateman and Dingell were not the only two outliers of this Congress; there were several others, such as Sherwood Boehlert (NY-23rd), a moderate Republican representing a rural district with a widespread hunting tradition (and which also happened to contain a Remington Arms Factory) who supported both the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban, or Earl Hilliard (AL-7th), a liberal Democrat who was the only member of the historically pro-control Congressional Black Caucus to oppose both pieces of legislation. While Hilliard's district was in the South, it was largely urban and a majority minority one; (with the majority of its population consisting of African-Americans) his was the only urban majority minority district in the House with a representative that opposed gun control during this Congress.

Regardless of what motivated their seemingly inscrutable voting decisions (a compelling case could be made that personal belief was at play),[18] in the context of today's hyper partisanship, Bateman, Dingell, Boehlert, and Hilliard are symbols of a bygone era- of a time when the gun control debate was sufficiently unpolarized to the extent that outliers could survive and thrive in Congress. This generation began voting on certain gun controls (such as background checks and assault weapons ban legislation) when they were first introduced, which allowed for a degree of electoral flexibility to make idiosyncratic choices and form positions that contrasted with one's party or ideologically like-minded peers. Yet critically, over time a type of generational replacement has occurred. While members of Congress today technically retain electoral independence from their parties, freshman members enter a very different Congress than their predecessors; a Congress where party issue positions are fixed and opposition groups have long since dissolved to a few odd members, making it inherently difficult to deviate from the party line. Overall, the degree of polarization present in Congress today has removed the electoral flexibility for members to make deviant voting choices- whether motivated by personal belief or other factors.

Overall, the existence of notable outliers during this Congress is highly significant, for they are indicative of an era in which members were freer from the electoral constraints of

[18] Arnold (1990) contends that while members of Congress will always consider how a potential vote will impact their future electoral success, if they determine that there is no 'correct' answer, then they will base their decision off of any other factors they find relevant (such as a belief that one policy choice is more effective, a desire to curry favor with their party leadership or in contrast to appear independent from their party, or due to personal belief related to an issue).

party affiliation than they are today, where, as will be seen in later chapters, there is little room for such outliers to survive.

Chapter Four: Conclusions

This chapter has identified various trends and divides in voting which were present in both parties during the 103rd Congress, demonstrating that there were variables (crime, district type, and region) influencing gun control voting which superseded both partisanship and critically, political ideology.

It is worth noting that the 103rd was not the first Congress to consider the Brady bill or the Assault weapons ban. The Brady bill (first introduced in 1987) had failed to pass in 1988 and had stalled at the Conference Committee stage in 1992; the Assault weapons ban (first introduced in 1989) did not make it past the Committee stage in 1990 and was stripped from being considered as part of an omnibus crime bill in 1991. That it took several years for these bills to pass and be signed into law is not unusual. Congress often takes years to pass landmark legislation, and particularly controversial legislation such as gun control, and these bills were considered the strictest gun controls considered by Congress up to that point. And most significantly, when issues are not hyper polarized along party lines, shifts in the national political climate have the potential to drive shifts/fluctuations in Congressional voting on that issue. For example, with the political and electoral relevance of the crime issue reaching peak levels around the timeframe of the 103rd Congress, 39 members of the House (9 Republicans and 30 Democrats) would reverse their 1991 'no' votes for the Assault weapons ban to 'yes' votes in 1994 (Idelson, 7 May 1994). With gun control not a fully polarized issue, members from both parties were freer to adjust their positions based on their individual electoral circumstances and cross the party line.

In summary, the thesis has argued that the 103rd Congress was able to pass landmark gun control because of how the peaking salience of crime as a priority political issue elevated its electoral significance for many members of both parties (particularly urban, suburban adjacent to urban, and Senators of states with large urban areas), who faced pressure to support it to appear 'tough on crime.' The words of Marsha Moode, a cable television host and constituent of pro-control urban Republican Steven Horn (CA-38th), are emblematic of the political context which fostered this bipartisan support- Moode telling the *New York Times*, "Anyone who says a word against the vote (for the assault weapons ban) almost seems

to be advocating violence in the streets...Californians feel such a terrible sense of crime. Everyone's putting a double lock on their doors. When I parked my car outside here, I looked around to see that everything was alright" (Mydans 1994, 2).

Yet critically, despite its successful passage and electoral relevance for many, there was still significant bipartisan opposition to the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban. For despite its salience at the national level, crime did not impact every member of Congress in equal measure; it was not the only variable influencing Congressional gun control voting. For some (particularly rural representatives, representatives of the South, or those from states with high gun ownership levels), there was greater incentive to oppose gun control than to support it. Ultimately, the electoral significance of crime, district type, and region (variables uniquely impacting gun voting) fostered both bipartisan support for and opposition to gun control during the 103rd Congress- the existence of minority opposition groups within each party translating into moderate levels of polarization in roll call voting.

Chapter Five: The Republican Revolution and the post Columbine debates

In January 1995, newly sworn in Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich penned a private letter (which was later leaked to *The Washington Post*) to the NRA's chief lobbyist Tanya Metaksa, promising that "as long as I am Speaker of this House, no gun control legislation is going to move in committee or on the floor of the House" (Daley 1995, 1). While a bold declaration, absent from the letter were any promises that rolling back existing gun control regulations or pursuing new gun rights legislation would be a political priority for the new Speaker. Despite the Republican party now having majority control of both chambers of Congress and the ability to agenda set, it appeared that at least initially, the Republican leadership's primary strategy regarding the gun control issue remained a defensive one. Yet even blocking gun control outright would not be the sole strategy adopted by the Republican majority leadership during this decade. Four years later, in the aftermath of a mass shooting at a Colorado high school, Gingrich's successor Dennis Hastert and the rest of the Republican leadership would find themselves in the novel position of offering gun control amendments of their own.

This Chapter will first discuss the 1994 midterm Congressional elections (most commonly referred to as the 'Republican Revolution') and assess its implications for gun control polarization, before moving on to an analysis of the remainder of the decade and specifically the post Columbine gun control debates of May/June 1999. It will demonstrate that despite the party gaining majority control of both chambers of Congress for the first time in nearly forty years, with crime remaining a priority political issue and Democratic pro-controller Bill Clinton still in the oval office, the Republican majority leadership's primary strategy involving the gun issue remained a defensive one to prevent the enactment of new gun controls. The chapter will further demonstrate that while partisan polarization on gun control (mainly in the Senate) had increased by the end of the decade, there was continuing bipartisan support for gun control- the issue remaining one of electoral concern for members of both parties. Overall, the most significant contributing factor to increasing gun control polarization during this decade was the replacement and regional realignment which had occurred primarily as a result of the Republican Revolution. Beyond replacement, the key forces for change that would first precipitate the dissolution of the Republican party's

minority opposition group and bring the parties closer to a state of hyper partisan polarization on gun control were not yet in motion by the end of the decade.

Part I: The Republican Revolution and a new majority

On November 8, 1994- less than two months after the federal Assault weapons ban was signed into law by president Clinton, the Republican party picked up 52 seats in the House and eight in the Senate from Democrats during that year's midterm Congressional elections, gaining majority control of Congress for the first time in nearly 40 years[1] (Shafer 1998). This 'Republican Revolution' (as it would come to be called) followed an election campaign run by then House Minority Whip and future Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. Tapping into what he perceived as a growing public distrust of Congress (according to the Gallup Organization, in March of 1992 Congress had a disapproval rating of 51 percent)(Ashford 1998, 99), Gingrich adopted a campaign strategy that painted Congressional Democrats as corrupt and introduced a 'Contract with America' that sought to "restore the bonds of trust between the people and their elected representatives" (Contract with America, 1994). Why Republican candidates were so successful during this election campaign is the subject of much academic discourse which does not fall within the scope of this thesis. Yet in terms of polarization, this Republican takeover of Congress was a noteworthy event, for it would come to have implications for partisan polarization in Congress generally and on the gun control issue specifically.

Applying their DW-nominate system, Poole and Rosenthal (2007) noted a significant increase in the degree of ideological polarization between the parties after the 1994 midterm elections, which they attributed to an influx of conservative Republicans who replaced moderate Democrats (Poole and Rosenthal 2007, 145). With fewer political moderates, they argued this greater degree of ideological polarization in Congress translated into more partisan polarized roll call voting in the following years. Yet in terms of increasing partisan polarization on the gun control issue specifically, the importance of the replacement that occurred during the Republican Revolution was less about ideology (although with most new conservatives being anti-control this was nonetheless important) and more to do with regional realignment. For while Republicans picked up seats from Democrats across the regions, the

[1] The Republican party gained control of the House for the first time since 1954 and the Senate for the first time since 1986, and none of the 169 Republican incumbents running for reelection were defeated (Shafer 1998).

majority of seats picked up from anti-control Democrats were in the South (the region which has historically had the highest gun ownership levels and lowest levels of public support for gun control)(Saad 2011, Jones 2013). The impact of the Republican Revolution on gun control polarization levels would not be immediate, as the following sections will illustrate. Yet in a 'big picture' sense, the replacement that occurred during the 1994 midterm elections (particularly in terms of the significant growth of the anti-control Republican majority) was significant in the long term.

Table 1: Key replacement after the 1994 midterm elections

Type of representative*	**Republican anti-controllers**	Republican pro-controllers	**Democratic anti-controllers**	Democratic pro-controllers
Net gain/loss	H: +50 S: +9	H: +3 S: -1	H: -23 S: -2	H: -25 S: -6
Region with biggest gain/loss	H: **South (+)** S: Midwest (+)	H: Northeast (+) S: Midwest (-)	H: **South (-)** S: **South (-)** /West (-)	H: Midwest (-) S:Midwest/ Northeast (-)

* This table is taking into consideration only the replacement of and by individuals who could be classified as either anti-control or pro-control based on their past and future voting records- I have not counted the replacement of gun control moderates (i.e. members who voted for some, but not for all or against all gun controls). I have also not counted replacement that left the status quo intact- for example an anti-control Democrat replacing an anti-control Democrat.

The Republican majority leadership and agenda setting

Poole and Rosenthal (2007) contend that "changes in the preferences expressed in the legislature occur through the replacement of legislators...replacement, particularly through its effect on party control, then induces the changes in policy" (93). The outcome of the 1994 midterm elections meant that the anti-control Republican majority leadership now had the ability to agenda set, while (assuming most of the fifty plus freshman Republicans would vote the party line) also having the votes to pass such an agenda. Yet when it came to the gun issue, the Republican takeover of Congress did not immediately lead to the rollback of existing gun control regulations or the pursuit of a gun rights legislative agenda. For critically, while the makeup of Congress had undergone a significant change practically overnight, the electoral pressures and incentives influencing gun control voting had not. This was evident even before the election result, in the way in which the Republican leadership handled the gun issue during the 1994 campaign as part of their Contract with America.

Crime, gun control, and the Contract with America

Drawing on policy recommendations from conservative think tanks such as The Heritage Foundation, The American Enterprise Institute, and The Cato Institute, Newt Gingrich's Contract with America, which was co-written with Republican House Minority leader Richard 'Dick' Armey, promised to bring ten bills to the House floor in the first 100 days of the 104th Congress. The Contract focused on various economic goals (which included balancing the federal budget, lowering taxes, controlling inflation, and curbing federal growth) as well as cultural aims (such as restoring traditional values and strengthening family ties through welfare reform and anti-crime legislation)(Ashford 1998). But while Gingrich and Armey were veteran anti-controllers, the Contract did not include any provisions to repeal existing gun control laws or to pass legislation to strengthen gun rights. Why was this the case?

The main political strategy behind the Contract with America was to establish a policy platform that had broad public appeal while also fostering an image of the Republican party as a cohesive unit (Drew 1996, Shafer 1998). To achieve this, its drafters needed to tread carefully and avoid divisive issues that risked alienating voters or dividing the party. As Gingrich's Press Secretary Tony Blankley explained, "we were obviously looking for legislation that we could all, virtually all, agree on and that we thought was popular and would pass ...We weren't looking for opportunities to have needless fights on marginally winnable issues" (Drew 1996, 32). Several issues that were considered in the drafting of the Contract were purposefully excluded from the final product, including abortion, school prayer, affirmative action, and Medicare reform, all of which were considered "electorally dangerous" (102) issues that could potentially detract from the broad bipartisan appeal of the Contract (Ashford 1998).

Also noticeably absent, for the same reasons, was any mention of the gun control issue. Given the interconnected relationship between crime and gun control and how the former elevated the electoral significance of the latter (refer to discussion beginning on page 57), vowing to roll back the gun control laws which had just passed with majority public support or to pursue new legislation to strengthen gun rights posed an electoral risk given the nation's continued focus on crime. Pre-election polling had indicated that crime was the 'most important problem' concerning voters, and significantly more so than the second and

third ranking issues, which were healthcare and the economy (refer to the table on page 53). Additionally, had the Republican leadership included gun control repeal or a gun rights platform within the Contract, it likely would have been condemned by the pro-controllers within the party- highlighting party divisiveness and potentially shattering the image of a cohesive Republican party united under the Contract.[2]

Thus when it came to the gun issue, Gingrich and Armey decided to leave it out of the Contract altogether. Recognizing that (in Armey's words) crime "was easily the biggest concern for most Americans" they instead focused on several 'tough on crime' provisions that had broad appeal with the public, including the deportation of illegal immigrants with criminal records, restitution for crime victims, construction grants to build more prisons, grants for law enforcement, and death penalty appeal reforms- all of which they included in their anti-crime package titled 'The Taking Back Our Streets Act' (Contract with America 1994, Idelson 1995). Explaining why they decided to keep the gun issue out of the Contract, Armey stated that the leadership did not want debate on their crime bill "to deteriorate into a debate over guns" and that he was "insistent on that" (Drew 1996, 100).

Yet leaving the issue out of the Contract with America was a strategic decision that came at a price. Behind the scenes, the NRA (which was spending heavily in support of Republican candidates during this election cycle) had been lobbying the Republican leadership to include a repeal of the federal Assault weapons ban within the Contract (Drew 1996). In negotiations with the organization, Republican leaders struck a deal with NRA representatives. While the Contract itself would not contain such a provision, if the party took control of the House, the leadership would see to it that a ban repeal vote was put on the floor sometime during the first session of the 104th Congress. Commenting on these negotiations, Armey would later tell a reporter "We had an agreement with the NRA- don't you put pressure on our crime bill, and we will take up the gun ban soon after the Contract" (Drew 1996, 101).

[2] 267 Republicans in total signed the Contract during the 1994 campaign, with only six (three incumbents and three challengers) declining to do so (Drew 1996).

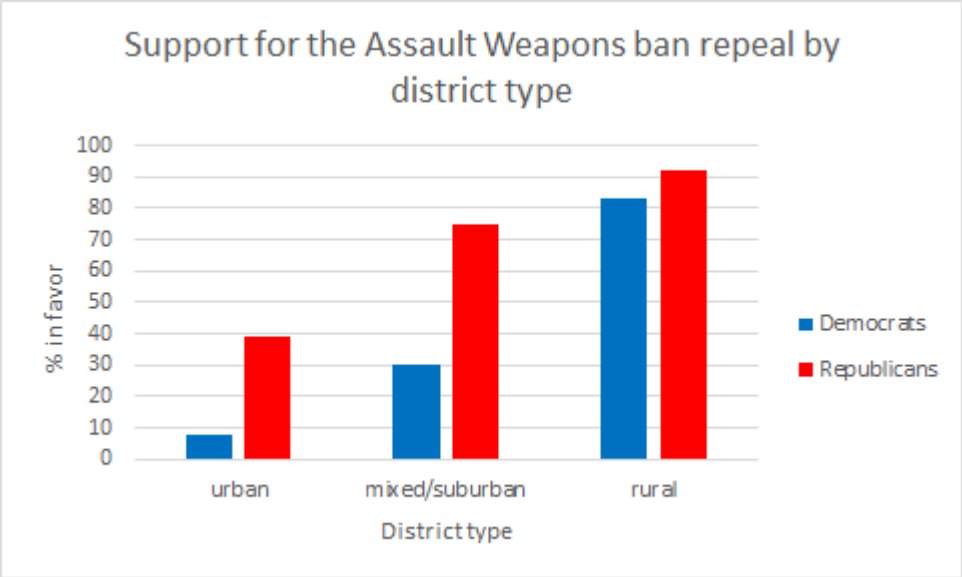
The Assault Weapons ban repeal vote

On March 22, 1996, Gingrich and Armey (now Speaker and House Majority leader respectively) made good on their promise, bringing a bill to repeal the Assault weapons ban up for consideration on the House floor, bypassing the hearing and Committee stages. The bill would pass 239-173- its comfortable margin aided by the support of the freshman class of Republicans in the House, most of whom had shown unflinching loyalty to the Speaker's legislative agenda during the 104th Congress (Sinclair 2000). Yet notably, despite the changes in party composition that had occurred between votes, the 1996 repeal vote was only slightly more partisan polarized than the original Assault weapons ban vote in 1994. Additionally, the same district type and regional divides in party voting remained (although in the case of the repeal, the divides in support were the inverse of those in 1994).

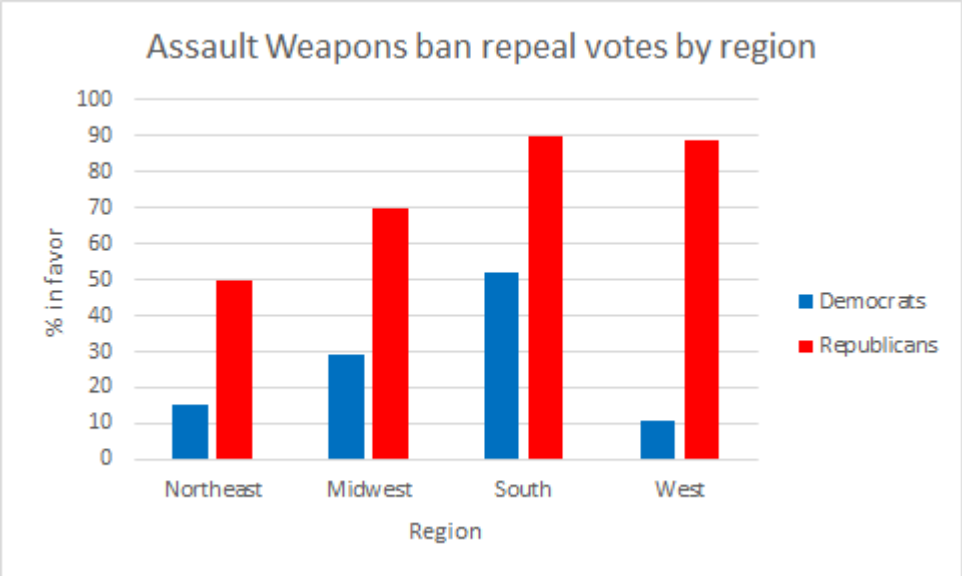
Table 2: House roll call voting on Assault Weapons ban and repeal

	Democrats	Republicans	Measure of Polarization*
Assault weapons ban (1994) Passed 215-214	177 yes (70%) 77 no (30%)	38 yes (22%) 137 no (78%)	.48
Assault weapons ban repeal (1996) Passed 239-173	56 yes (30%) 130 no (70 %)	183 yes (81%) 42 no (19%)	.51

Graph 1: Support for the Assault Weapons ban repeal by district type



Graph 2: Support for the Assault Weapons ban repeal by region



Polarization and the repeal vote

Why, despite the significant growth of the Republican anti-control majority in the House, was the 1996 repeal vote only slightly more partisan polarized than the original vote? First, while the Democratic party had lost anti-controllers in the 1994 elections, the party had lost even more pro-control members (see page 109). As a result, percentage wise, the size of the party's anti-control minority opposition group relative to the pro-control party majority remained the same (with 30 percent of House Democrats opposing the ban in 1994 and

supporting the repeal in 1996). Additionally, most of the members from both parties who remained from the 103rd Congress maintained issue stance continuity- in other words, most individuals who had opposed the ban in 1994 voted for its repeal in 1996, while the majority who had supported the ban initially opposed its repeal. Such continuity amongst remaining members is indicative of the fact that while the makeup of Congress had changed, the electoral pressures and incentives influencing gun issue voting had not.

Symbolism over legislative substance

While bringing up the repeal vote appeared to be a bold gun rights agenda setting play by the Republican House leadership, it was, as *Congressional Quarterly* put it, "a move laden with greater political than legislative significance" ("House Votes to Repeal Assault Weapons Ban" in *CQ Almanac 1996, 5*). At the time of the vote, the leadership was plausibly aware that Senate Majority leader Bob Dole of Kansas (who was by this point the presumptive Republican nominee for the 1996 presidential race) was not going to bring any divisive legislation to the Senate floor which could potentially compromise his campaign, and after the ban repeal passed the House, the anti-control Dole would tell reporters that taking the repeal up in the Senate was "not a priority" (Green 1996, 2) and that he did not think it would pass. Other anti-control Senate Republicans such as James Inhofe (OK) expressed similar sentiments, Inhofe telling reporters "There's no interest in doing it" (Harris and Dewar 1996, 1). Meanwhile, President Clinton had publicly vowed to veto a ban repeal if it reached his desk (Drew 1996, 68). With the legislation unlikely to move beyond the House, bringing the vote to the floor cost the House leadership little, yet they had successfully negotiated to keep the divisive gun issue out of their Contract with America during the 1994 election campaign, while still keeping a campaign promise to the NRA that reinforced mutually beneficial existing political loyalties. In this sense, the outcome was far from a defeat for Gingrich and the Republican House leadership.

Political opportunity and a strategy of defense

The Assault Weapons ban repeal vote was the Republican leadership's first and last attempt at pursuing the repeal of existing gun control legislation during this decade. Overall, their primary strategy would remain the same as it had been before they gained majority control of Congress- a defensive one to prevent the enactment of new gun controls. Why was this the case? Ultimately, despite their newfound position, the leadership still had institutional

and political constraints to contend with. One institutional obstacle was the sitting Democratic president; attempting to pass gun rights or repeal gun control legislation would be an uphill battle with president Clinton wielding veto power. Yet this was not the sole barrier. With agenda setting control, there was nothing preventing the Republican leadership from pursuing gun rights as a symbolic, statement making exercise; that they refrained (the exception being the aforementioned ban repeal) was telling. For beyond the presidential veto, the continued salience of the crime issue did not foster the ideal electoral environment for such pursuits.

While crime rates began to decline after the national violent crime rate peaked in 1991 (see graph on page 49) crime would remain a priority political issue for the public throughout the decade. As it had in the previous two, crime was a prominent feature in the 1996 presidential campaign, with gun control often being discussed in relation to it. During the first televised presidential debate, President Clinton credited his anti-crime agenda with bringing crime rates down while also promising to pursue additional crime legislation, telling the audience in his opening statement "We passed 100,000 police on the streets, the assault weapons ban, the Brady Bill. Now let's keep going by finishing the work of putting more police on the street and tackling juvenile gangs" (Commission on Presidential Debates, October 6, 1996). For his part, Republican candidate and Kansas Senator Bob Dole credited the 'tough on crime' policies of Republican mayors and governors throughout the country (such as New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani) for bringing down crime rates as opposed to Clinton's policies. That both crime and gun control remained salient general election issues was particularly evident in Dole's response to a question about the assault weapons ban. When asked if he would repeal the ban (which he had voted against) if he became president, the anti-control Dole indicated that he would not do so, telling debate moderator Jim Lehrer "It seemed to me at the time the assault weapon ban was not effective. But that's history. I told the NRA that's history...I'm not going to worry about it anymore (Commission on Presidential Debates, October 6, 1996).

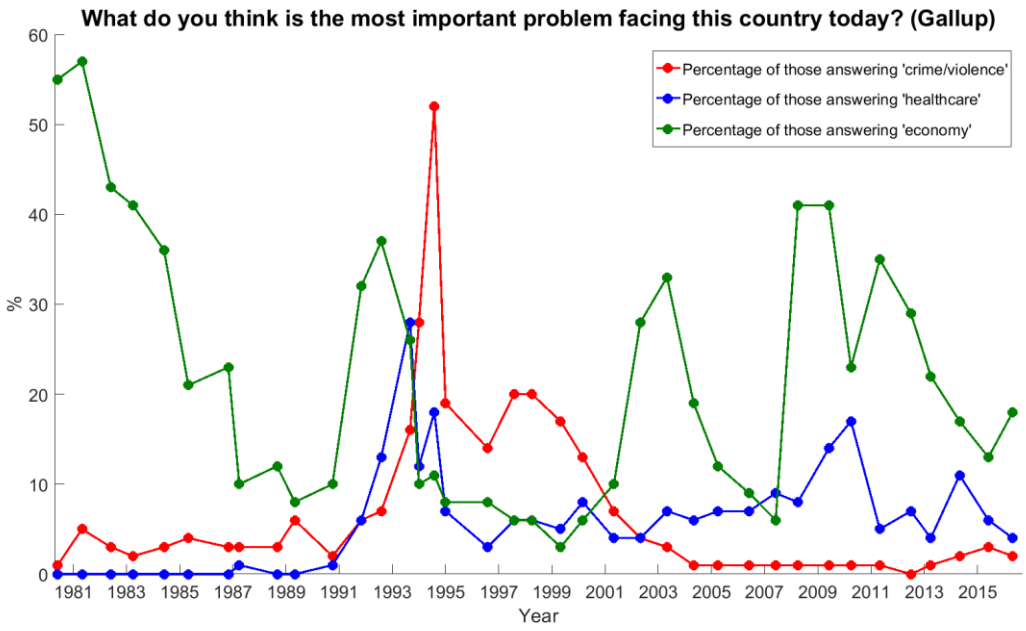
Two years later in 1998, crime would again hold the top position in the Gallup Organization's 'most important problem' poll, and while the percentage for crime was lower than it had been when it was the 'most important problem' in 1994, crime nonetheless retained the top spot, while it would consistently rank above other priority political issues

such as the economy and healthcare throughout the second half of the decade, as it evident in graph 3 below.

Table 3: What do you think is the most important problem facing the country today? (Gallup, April 1998)

20%	Crime/violence
16%	Ethics/moral decline
13%	Education
12%	Drugs
6%	Economy in general
5%	Unemployment/jobs

Graph 3: 'Most important problem' (Crime/Healthcare/Economy)



With crime remaining a priority political issue and the crime and gun control issues intertwined, gun control was an issue of electoral concern for members of Congress throughout the decade. Because of this, rolling back existing gun control regulations was too electorally risky, even for the self-professed party of gun rights.

Part II: The post Columbine gun control debates

On April 20, 1999, teenagers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed twelve students and one teacher at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in what was up to that point the deadliest school shooting in American history (Olinger 2000). A week later, president Clinton held a press conference in which he outlined plans for a juvenile crime bill and called for a renewed Congressional effort to pass gun controls, telling the audience "This is about protecting our children...it is crazy that we're living in a society that takes no reasonable steps to protect the larger community" (Homsher 2001, 170). Galvanized by the events and the public outcry that followed, in the following months both chambers of Congress began putting together omnibus juvenile crime bills for the stated purpose of combating juvenile crime and violence generally and preventing a future Columbine specifically. Given the latter, gun control would be at the center of the post Columbine Congressional debates. But how would the circumstances of the event itself impact the rhetoric used and arguments made for and against the enactment of gun control?

The floor debate

During the 103rd Congress, gun control had been primarily debated in terms of its efficacy as a component of general crime control. Yet in 1999, Congress was debating gun control specifically in response to a school shooting. Given this, that the rhetoric used would in certain respects differ from the previous floor debates was unsurprising; a school shooting in an upper-middle class suburb of Denver was symbolically a far cry from gang related gun violence on the streets of New York or Los Angeles. But why was Congress responsive to this particular mass shooting? Columbine was by no means the first school shooting to occur in the United States,[3] nor was it the deadliest mass shooting event up to that point in time. However, it was the first to unfold on live television, as CNN and other networks broadcast footage of SWAT police running alongside terrified teenagers exiting the school with their arms raised above their heads (Cullen 2009). With Columbine generating more media attention and a higher public profile than other mass shootings, Congress felt compelled to act- with floor debate beginning in the Senate a month after the shooting. The arguments

[3] Numerous high profile school shootings had occurred in prior years, including one at an elementary school in Stockton, California that killed five and wounded 32 in 1989 and a shooting at a middle school in Jonesboro, Arkansas that killed five and injured ten in 1998. Handgun Control, Inc (later renamed the Brady Campaign) reported that there were at least 18 other mass shootings (both school shootings and non) in the United States in 1999 (Palmer 2000).

made and rhetoric used would be a mixture of old and new; familiar dialogues about urban gun violence juxtaposed with novel arguments about violence in youth culture. One question would come to dominate the debate: Was the Columbine shooting the product of ease of access to firearms? Or was a youth culture influenced by violent films, rock music, video games, and the breakdown of the family unit primarily to blame?

The pro-control side: Protecting the children, everyday gun violence, and ease of access

In the context of peaking crime rates and public concerns about crime, gun control supporters during the 103rd Congress had often utilized a distinct kind of imagery- depicting gun violence in terms of urban crime (refer to discussion on page 76). During the post Columbine debates of 1999 however, because gun control was being debated specifically in response to a school shooting, some of the rhetoric used was tailored to better fit the suburban school shooting narrative- for citing "drive-by, and drive-in shootings" that left Americans "not safe in their own homes" (103rd Cong. Rec. H9093 (1993)) was not relevant to the particulars of the case. The most prevalent new rhetorical emphasis involved the need for additional gun controls to protect America's children. For example, representative Nancy Johnson (R:CT-6th) urged her colleagues to support strengthening background checks legislation because "It is children's lives at stake" (106th Cong. Rec. H4569 (1999)), while Stephen Horn (R:CA-38th) and Senator Herb Kohl (D:WI) respectively cited the "need to protect the children of America" and " to help make children safer" for their continued support for gun control (106th Cong. Rec. H4622 (1999)).

However, despite the newfound school shooting focus, many gun control supporters (and in particular urban representatives) harkened back to the focus of previous debates, emphasizing that the gun violence problem was not primarily about high profile mass shootings (which many anti-controllers argued could not be prevented), but the everyday deaths that occurred on America's streets and in American homes. In discussing the protection of America's children, Senator Mike DeWine (R:OH) specifically pointed out that "13 children a day are killed by guns in this country- in effect, the Littleton massacre every day...maybe we can't prevent a massacre such as the one in Colorado, but we can work on broader initiatives that would save some of the 13 children a day who are dying in gun-related deaths" (106th Cong. Rec. S4510 (1999)). Representatives Carrie Meek (D:FL-17th) and John Lewis (D:GA-5th) emphasized the continuing epidemic of gun violence in their

urban districts, Meek telling the House “In the district I represent, they are killed every day, children are killed by spraying bullets” (106th Cong. Rec. H4583 (1999)) while John Lewis (D:GA-5th) proclaimed “34,000 lives lost to gun violence last year... on our streets, in our neighborhoods, on our playgrounds” (106th Cong. Rec. H4595 (1999)).

Overall, despite the school shooting focus, the primary argument in support of stricter gun controls remained the same. For supporters, reducing gun violence (whether everyday gun violence in urban areas or specific mass shootings like Columbine) called for stricter gun controls to prevent individuals who should not have access to firearms from being able to obtain them. Whether the trigger was pulled by a gang member in Los Angeles or a high school student in Littleton was irrelevant; as Senator Carl Levin (D:MI) told the Senate, “There is no one cause of youth violence, the causes are many. But among them there is one that cannot be ignored or denied: the easy access our young people have to deadly weapons” (106th Cong. Rec. S5224 (1999)).

The anti-control side: Violence in entertainment and the breakdown of the family unit

Like their pro-control colleagues, anti-controllers in Congress adapted their rhetoric to fit the circumstances of the Columbine case. The Columbine shooting had brought to the forefront a different type of shooter than the career criminal or violent gang member: the upper-middle class, suburban high school student. Shortly after the event, a deluge of personal information about the shooters was reported by the media. What emerged was a portrait of two angry youths in black trenchcoats who listened to heavy metal music, enjoyed gory Hollywood films, and played violent video games (Cullen 2009). Concerns about the impact of violent media and entertainment depictions on youth culture began to permeate public discourse, and gun control opponents in Congress were quick to appropriate these concerns in the post Columbine floor debates. For example, Senator Kit Bond (R:MO) asked the Senate, “exactly who in this country has glamorized guns and violence?” before responding “Quite simply, it is the entertainment industry. Guns, gore, and violence, targeted not at soccer moms- but to their sons” (106th Cong. Rec. S5698 (1999)). Similarly, Ralph Hall (D:TX-4th) blamed Columbine on “the amount of sex and violence in our children's music, movies and games” (106th Cong. Rec. H4569 (1999)).

Another popular argument was that Columbine was the product of a breakdown of the family unit. This became one of the most widely cited in the floor debates because it fit the circumstances of the Columbine case well. Both shooters had been stockpiling weapons and making homemade bombs in their bedrooms, evading the notice of their inattentive parents. As Ron Packard (R:CA-48th) proclaimed, "I wish we could forever end violent crimes in our schools by a simple act of Congress. Unfortunately, no success can ever compensate for failure in the home" (106th Cong. Rec. H4577 (1999)). John Thune (R:SD-at large) agreed with this sentiment, arguing that the answers to preventing another Columbine did not lie in enacting more gun controls, but "are found in the human heart. They are found in the American home. They are found in the pews of our churches and around dinner tables at night" (106th Cong. Rec. H4581 (1999)).

But despite the newfound focus on violent video games and broken families, some anti-controllers stuck to more traditional arguments, such as the notion that gun control laws do not work because criminals do not follow laws. As Gene Green (D:TX-29th) argued, "Are you telling me that that person who is refused because of that background check did not also go out and find a gun on the illegal market?"(106th Cong. Rec. H4588 (1999)). Another argument was the need for better enforcement of existing gun control laws rather than the enactment of new ones. Senator Gordon Smith (R:OR) stated that "One of the most appalling revelations to come out of the tragedies of Littleton is that gun laws are not prosecuted by this administration. We can pass all the laws in the world on guns but if they are not enforced they are of little value to this country" (106th Cong. Rec. S5698 (1999)). By highlighting the Clinton administration's failure to prosecute gun crimes, anti-control Republicans were painting Democrats as 'weak on crime'- an accusation they had been wielding throughout the decade. Overall, gun control opponents argued that whether the context of the debate was everyday urban gun violence or mass shooting incidents in the suburbs, the fundamental problems with gun control were the same: criminals don't follow gun laws, and existing laws are not enforced.

The roll call votes

Closing the 'gun show loophole'

In terms of gun control, the primary focus of the post Columbine debates involved background checks legislation. It had been reported in the media that a friend of the

Columbine shooters had purchased two of the firearms used from an unlicensed dealer at a gun show in Denver; private sales at gun shows made through unlicensed dealers were exempt from the background check and waiting period requirements of the Brady bill (Olinger 2000). Ending this exemption for unlicensed dealers was the primary goal of gun control supporters in Congress, and it was referred to throughout the debate as 'closing the gun show loophole' in the Brady bill.[4]

The Democratic party's answer to 'closing the gun show loophole' came in the form of the Lautenberg amendment in the Senate and the McCarthy amendment in the House. Both amendments required that all unlicensed dealers at gun shows take their transactions to a licensed vendor at the show to conduct a check on their behalf, and they defined a gun show as a gathering where more than 50 guns were being sold. The most contested element involved a waiting period provision for the purchase of a firearm. While by this point a national instant check system was in place, in the quarter of cases where there was not enough information on a buyer to complete an instant check, law enforcement was given a waiting period (five business days for gun store purchases and three business days for licensed dealers at gun shows) to conduct a background check. The Democratic amendments included a three business day waiting period provision for all dealers at gun shows (Carney, May 22, 1999).

The Republican strategy: An alternative choice

As Congress began organizing to debate juvenile crime and gun control in the weeks after Columbine, both Senate Majority leader Trent Lott and Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert made public statements expressing a willingness to work with Democrats towards crafting some gun control legislation, Lott telling reporters "You know, there are some things we can do to keep guns out of the hands of kids. Hopefully, we can limit their access to assault weapons. We can have trigger devices for safety in the home" (Dloughy 1999, 1) while Hastert stated "We support tightening laws to bring uniformity between gun shows and gun shops. We support instant background checks at gun shows" (Eilperin 1999, 1). Such statements were noteworthy (and even described as "one of the most remarkable political

[4] While individuals on both sides of the issue referred to the 'gun show loophole' throughout the debate, one could argue that passing legislation requiring background checks be conducted by unlicensed dealers was an expansion of the existing law rather than the closing of a loophole.

adjustments of recent Congressional vintage" (Carney, 12 June 1999, 2)) considering that the Republican leadership was comprised of anti-controllers. Yet with gun control polling indicating both a spike in general support after Columbine (refer to graph 7 on page 203) and strong majority public support for a universal system of background checks at gun shows,[5] it was wise for them to tread carefully. Speaking about his party's handling of the gun issue after Columbine, House Majority Whip Tom DeLay told a reporter "member's nerves are on edge" (Martinez 1999, 2).

The anti-control Republican majority leadership would ultimately adopt a strategy of defense during these debates, but not defense by using procedural maneuvers to limit debate or block gun control amendments outright. In fact, little effort was made to control the debate, with Senate Majority leader Trent Lott in particular facing criticism from anti-controllers in the Senate (Lott responded to these criticisms by stating "You don't allow debate to happen. It happens!")(Carney, May 22, 1999). Rather, the Republican strategy was one of damage control; a strategy to peel away votes from the Democratic amendments by offering their own, comparatively weaker background check amendments to be voted on. These amendments would be tempting for swing votes, gun control moderates, and individuals juggling competing pressures from both sides of the issue, as they offered political cover- one could contend they had voted for background checks legislation while also supporting an amendment that would be "grudgingly" (in the words of sponsor Senator Larry Craig) tolerated by the NRA, who had conceded that the passage of a weaker law was worth preventing a stricter one (Walsh and Suro 1999).

First term Republican Senator Gordon Smith (OR) was the type of individual the Republican leadership sought to attract with their alternative amendments. On one hand, Smith was an NRA endorsed, self-professed defender of the Second Amendment who expressed concern about the rights of hunters in rural Oregon. On the other, he was a Republican Senator in a competitive state that had twice gone for Clinton in 1992 and 1996 (and his predecessor, Republican Mark Hatfield, had been a pro-controller), a state which had dealt with its own high profile school shooting in the city of Springfield the previous year. Publicly Smith appeared conflicted- after casting an initial vote to table the Democratic

[5] For example, a Washington Post/ABC News Poll conducted in April 1999 found that 89 percent of Americans supported legislation requiring all gun dealers conduct background checks at gun shows; a poll from CNN/Gallup around the same time similarly reported that 87 percent of Americans supported such legislation.

party's amendment, he told reporters the following day "I woke up feeling ashamed and determined to change this", threatening to support the Democratic amendment if the Republican alternative did not meet his expectations (Toner 1999, 1). A few days later, Smith would opt for the newly crafted Republican alternative- the Craig amendment.

Disagreement amongst the House leadership

While the Republican leadership was on board with the alternative choice amendment strategy, amongst the House leadership, there was some notable inter-party animus on display. Speaker Dennis Hastert, who had publicly expressed a willingness to compromise with Democrats and who had tasked gun control supporter Henry Hyde (IL-6th) with drafting a Republican gun control package "on behalf of the entire elected Republican leadership" (Carney, 12 June 1999) was undermined by his colleagues, House Majority leader Richard Armey and House Majority Whip Tom DeLay- both of whom publicly disavowed the Speaker's package (Bruni 1999). Instead, in a decision that surprised many, DeLay reached across the aisle and enlisted the help of veteran anti-control Democrat John Dingell (MI-16th) to draft an additional background checks amendment (Bruni 1999). In discussing their partnership, Dingell praised DeLay for being "the fella to talk to around here to get things done" (Foerstel 1999, 1). Having a Senior House Democrat sponsor the weakest amendment on offer was an astute political move that angered Democrats and delighted Republicans. James Moran (D:VA-8th) would complain to reporters that "The message is mixed when the senior Democrat offers the weakest amendment" (Martinez 1999, 2) while Mark Foley (R:FL-16th) would boast "Thanks to Dingell, nobody can blame any Republican necessarily for the failure of the (Democratic) gun bill" (Clines 1999, 1).

The alternative choice amendments

The Republican sponsored alternative background check amendments were the Craig amendment in the Senate and the Dingell amendment in the House. While they contained several differences, the main way in which they diverged from the Democratic sponsored amendments involved the waiting period provision- for the Democratic amendments it was a three business day waiting period (for those individuals who weren't immediately cleared through the instant check system) while for the Republican alternatives it was a 24 hour waiting period. The omnibus Hyde-McCollum amendment (which had been assigned to

Henry Hyde at Speaker Hastert's instruction) included a 72 hour waiting period provision; however since the amendment was not solely a background checks amendment (it contained 30+ provisions including some not directly related to gun control) it will not be included in this Chapter's analysis.

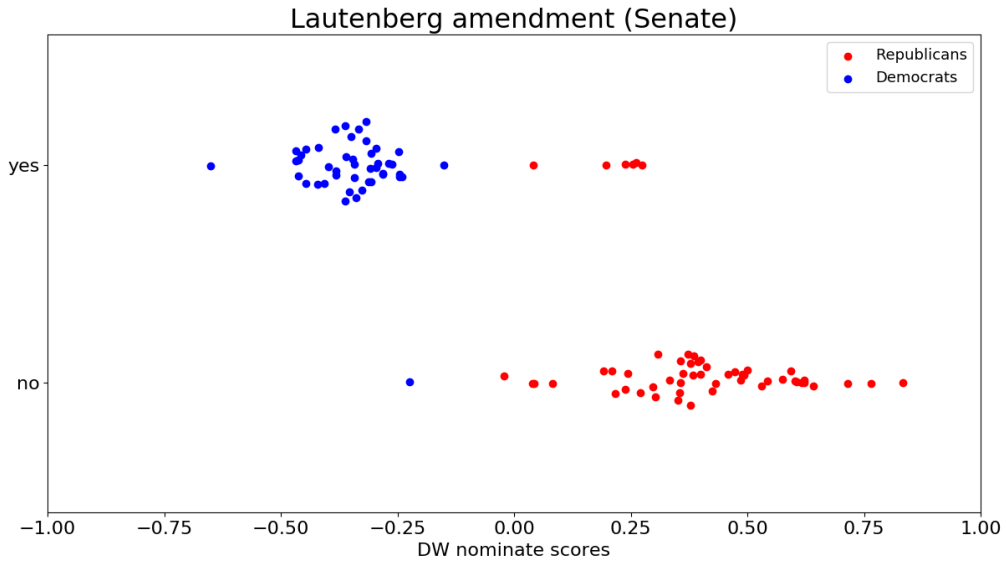
Ultimately the Craig, Lautenberg (which was stricter than Craig, thus cancelling out most of its provisions), and Dingell amendments would pass, while the McCarthy amendment would fail. While all the votes were more partisan polarized than the previous votes taken on the Brady bill, the two Senate votes were significantly more so.

Table 4: Congressional background checks legislation

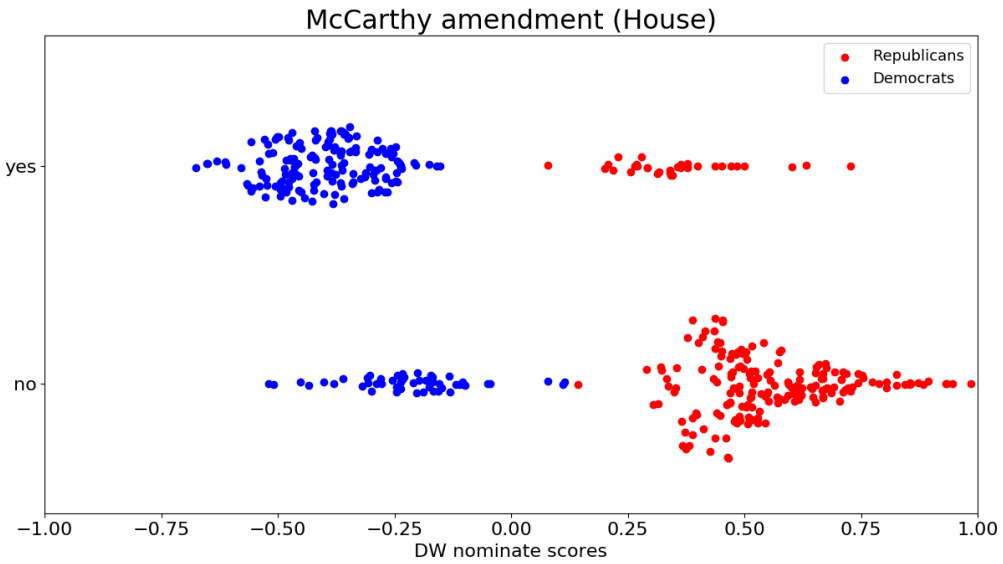
Legislation	Key provisions	Democrats	Republicans	Independents	Measure of polarization
Senate					
Brady bill (1993) Passed 63-36	Required federal background checks on firearms purchasers; three day waiting period for licensed dealers at gun shows	47 yes (85%) 8 no (15%)	16 yes (36%) 28 no (64%)	-	.49
Lautenberg amendment (1999) Passed 51-50 (Vice president Gore tie breaker)	Required that all dealers at gun shows perform background checks; 3 business day waiting period	44 yes (98%) 1 no (2 %)	6 yes (11%) 49 no (89%)	-	.87
Craig amendment (1999) Passed 53-45	Required that all dealers at gun shows perform background checks; 24 hour waiting period provision	4 yes (9%) 40 no (91%)	49 yes (92%) 5 no (8%)	-	.84

House					
Brady bill (1993) Passed 238-189	Same as above in Senate	184 yes (73%) 69 no (27%)	54 yes (31%) 119 no (69%)	1 no (100%)	.42
McCarthy amendment (1999) Failed 193-235	Same as Lautenberg above	159 yes (76%) 49 no (24 %)	33 yes (15%) 186 no (85%)	1 yes (100%)	.61
Dingell amendment (1999) Passed 218-211	Same as Craig	45 yes (22%) 163 no (78%)	173 yes (79%) 47 no (21%)	1 no (100%)	.57

Graph 4: The Lautenberg amendment (Senate)



Graph 5: The McCarthy amendment (House)



The post Columbine gun control votes: Analysis

Unlike with the Brady bill votes where one was either voting for or against the legislation, with both parties offering competing background check amendments there is much to unpack. For example, a few Democrats and Republicans in the Senate initially voted for the Republican sponsored Craig amendment but then later voted for the stricter Lautenberg amendment; in the House, some anti-controllers joined pro-controllers in opposing the Dingell amendment, but on absolutist grounds, being unwilling to cast a yes vote for any form of background checks legislation. Analyzing all the dynamics at play and tracking how every member voted across all four votes would comprise a thesis in itself- for this reason, an analytical focus has been chosen. For comparative purposes, the following sections will primarily involve evaluating party support for the Democratic background check amendments in comparison to the original Brady bill votes.

Why increasing polarization?

Replacement

The post Columbine background check votes were more partisan polarized than the original Brady bill votes, and significantly so in the Senate. A key contributing factor to this was replacement. As discussed at the beginning of the chapter, the Republican Revolution of 1994 had brought a significant degree of change to the makeup of Congress, with an influx of

anti-control Republicans and a loss of anti-control Democrats (and particularly in the South). In the years since, additional replacement had occurred- notable changes including the loss of four Republican pro-controllers in the Senate due to retirement. Additionally, over this timeframe four anti-control Democrats had defected to the Republican party[6]-a compelling indication that the process of party realignment that had begun over twenty years earlier had not yet fully ceased.

Table 5: Replacement between the 103rd and 106th Congresses

	Democratic pro-controllers	Democratic anti-controllers	Republican pro-controllers	Republican anti-controllers
103rd Congress	S: 47 H: 184	S: 9 H: 69	S: 16 H: 54	S:28 H: 119
106th Congress	S: 41 H: 157	S: 5 H: 50	S: 12 H: 48	S: 43 H: 150
Gain/Loss of seats	S: -6 H: -27	**S: -4** **H: -19**	S: -4 H: -6	**S: +15** **H: +50**
Primary type of replacement	Anti-control R's replacing pro-control D's. .	S: Anti-control D's switching parties; replacement by anti-control R's. H: Anti-control R's replacing anti- control D's.	S: Pro-control R's retiring, replaced by anti-control R's. H: Pro-control D's replacing pro-control R's.	Anti-control R's replacing pro- and anti- control D's.
Region with most seats gained/lost	South (-)	**South (-)**	Northeast (-)	**South (+)**

*Replacement occurs through the retirement or reelection defeat of a candidate. While the existence of the alternative choice amendments muddy the analytical waters in terms of categorizing new members as pro or anti-control, for the purposes of this chart, individual replacers are counted as pro-control if they supported the Democratic background check amendments and as anti-control if they opposed them. As a final point, this chart has also factored in instances such as where a pro-control Republican replaced an anti-control Republican or a pro-control Democrat an anti-control one.

[6] The individuals who switched parties were Ben Nighthorse-Campbell (CO) and Richard Shelby (AL) in the Senate and Nathan Deal (GA-9th) and Billy Tauzin (LA-3) in the House.

Beyond replacement

Yet while replacement played a key role, it was not the sole explanation for increasing polarization. The table below shows the roll call votes for the Democratic background check amendments as they were and, as an exercise projecting continuity between votes,[7] how they would have turned out had all of the remaining Republicans who voted for the Brady bill voted for the Lautenberg amendment and all the remaining Democrats who had opposed the Brady bill opposed Lautenberg as well. Overall, it is evident that some members in both parties made a different voting decision on background checks the second time around. But why?

Table 6: Polarization and the Democratic background check amendments

	Democrats	Republicans	Measure of polarization*
Lautenberg Amendment vote	44 yes (98%) 1 no (2 %)	6 yes (11%) 49 no (89%)	.87
Lautenberg Amendment **(with continuity)**	40 yes (89%) 5 no (13 %)	12 yes (22%) 43 no (78%)	.67
McCarthy Amendment vote	159 yes (76%) 49 no (24 %)	33 yes (15%) 186 no (85%)	.61
McCarthy Amendment **(with continuity)**	151 yes (73%) 57 no (27%)	48 yes (23%) 165 no (77%)	.50

Alternative choice amendments and the Republican party

The Republican leadership's decision to introduce their own background check amendments instead of simply opposing the Democratic ones was a strategy to both provide political cover for electorally vulnerable party members and to peel away votes from the stricter Democratic amendments. Did these amendments manage to garner support from Republican Brady bill supporters at the expense of the stricter Lautenberg and McCarthy amendments? As the above table indicates, the answer is yes. The Republican alternative amendments would receive support from six of the nine remaining Brady bill supporters in

[7] Why an expectation of continuity would not be unreasonable will be explained in the section 'continuity and background checks' on page 130.

the Senate (67 percent) and 15 of the 45 (33 percent) in the House. And while they did not sway the most committed pro-controllers in the party, the amendments were particularly successful at picking up votes from conservative gun control moderates who faced competing electoral pressures from both sides of the issue.

For example, Senators Strom Thurmond (SC) and Kay Hutchison (TX) voted for the weaker, Republican sponsored Craig instead of the Lautenberg amendment. Both Senators, who had cultivated 'tough on crime' personas throughout the decade (see footnote 15 on page 96), had supported the Brady bill in 1993. Yet as conservatives representing red, high gun ownership states of the South, they were less insulated from electoral risk for their gun control support than their Republican colleagues John Chafee (RI) and Peter Fitzgerald (IL)- both of whom represented blue states with comparatively low gun ownership levels and who were Lautenberg supporters. Given their political circumstances, the Republican amendments offered the appeal of political cover- allowing them to vote for background checks legislation without supporting the strictest amendment on offer.

Similarly in the House, while political moderates and suburban adjacent to urban representatives such as Wayne Gilchrest (MD-1st), Marge Roukema (NJ-5th), and Rick Lazio (NY-2nd) voted for the strictest-on-offer McCarthy amendment, other Brady bill supporters such as suburban representatives Pete Hoekstra (MI-2nd), Cliff Stearns (FL-16th), Nick Smith (MI-7th), and Porter Goss (FL-14th) opted for the weaker alternative Dingell amendment. Based on their DW-nominate scores, all four of these individuals were amongst the most conservative half of their party during both the 103rd and 106th Congresses.[8] And while at this point in time there was flexibility within conservatism to be a 'common sense' conservative for gun control (and there were still conservatives voting for the strictest amendments), having the option to support a weaker amendment was a tempting offer for many- particularly in light of the inter-party competition posed by the influx of conservative freshman Republicans during the Republican Revolution of 1994.

[8] For example during the 106th Congress with scores of 0.529 (Goss), 0.673 (Stearns), 0.711 (Smith) and 0.726 (Hoekstra).

Continuity and background checks

Given that a direct comparison between the Brady bill and the post Columbine background check amendment votes cannot be made due to their legislative differences, is it fair to expect continuity in voting patterns? Could the Republicans who voted for Brady but then opted for the weaker Republican amendments have considered themselves to be issue consistent, simply viewing the Democrats version of 'closing the gun show loophole' to be overly strict? Possibly. Yet considering the specific contents of the legislation itself, this argument is not the most plausible. First, the original Brady bill contained a three-day waiting period provision for licensed dealers at gun shows. From a policy perspective, why would an individual support a three-day waiting period for licensed dealers at a gun show but not for unlicensed dealers selling firearms at the same show? Additionally, it is worth pointing out that the waiting periods in all of the background check amendments were universal (meaning they would apply to both licensed and unlicensed dealers at gun shows). This meant that while in one regard the Republican amendments expanded upon existing law (by requiring a background check and waiting period for unlicensed dealers) in another they weakened it (by making the waiting period for licensed dealers 24 hours instead of the three business days that currently existed). Again, from a policy perspective, if one is being issue consistent, why would they support a bill with a three-day waiting period for licensed dealers but then vote for an amendment that would weaken this provision?

Additionally, most of the Brady supporters who voted for the Republican amendments did not justify their decisions in terms of legislative specifics; rather, they contended they were pursuing "balance" and "common ground" while voting for the amendments which had the greatest chance of passage. For example, Senator Jim Jeffords (VT) stressed the need for bipartisan compromise as he endorsed the Craig amendment, stating that the Senate needed to work to "find common ground to resolve an issue vital to the Nation" (106th Cong. Rec. S5636 (1999)). Representative Nick Smith (MI-7th) chastised those supporting the McCarthy amendment for pursuing legislation that was unlikely to get the votes needed to pass, urging passage of the Dingell amendment, whose 24 hour background check provision he deemed "reasonable legislation" (106th Cong. Rec. H4583 (1999)). In endorsing his own amendment (which was stricter than Dingell but slightly weaker than McCarthy) Henry Hyde (IL-6th) asked his colleagues "Do we go forward, or do we go backwards?" and implored "nobody gets everything they want in a bill...balance is what we are looking for, protecting

Constitutional rights and protecting kids" (106th Cong. Rec. H4596 (1999)). As a final example, in expressing support for the Dingell amendment, Porter Goss (FL-14th) stated "Today we have the opportunity to take a balanced approach to closing the loopholes in the Brady bill" (106th Cong. Rec. H4589 (1999)). By presenting themselves as compromisers, it was evident that despite not supporting the strictest amendments on offer, these individuals still wanted credit for their gun control support, and were not interested in debating questions of issue continuity or legislative specifics.

Given these considerations, the most plausible argument for the lack of continuity between votes from some Brady supporters has little to do with legislative specifics. Rather, certain members (particularly those who faced competing electoral pressures from both sides of the issue) were tempted by, and ultimately took advantage of, the political cover that the alternative amendments offered.

Democratic unity in the Senate

The high degree of polarization in the Senate (and particularly in comparison to the House, which was significantly less polarized) on background checks was driven more by Democrats than Republicans; only one Democrat would oppose the party's Lautenberg amendment, while four who had voted against the Brady bill in 1993 (John Breaux (LA), Richard Bryan (NV), Fritz Hollings (SC), and Patrick Leahy (VT)) supported it. The yes votes of these four (three of whom had also opposed the Assault Weapons ban in 1994) were noteworthy considering their anti-control voting records. What was unifying Senate Democrats?

One major change since the 103rd Congress was their newfound position as the minority party. While during the previous gun control debates Democrats enjoyed a comfortable 56/44 majority in the Senate and had majority control of the House, by the 106th they had lost control of both chambers and now faced a 55/45 deficit in the Senate. With six pro-control Republican Senators remaining, if Democrats could pick up a few votes within their party the Lautenberg amendment had a solid chance of passing- which would provide the party with a major political victory and deliver a high profile public defeat to the Republican majority. From an optics perspective, what did occur was arguably better for the party image than an outright majority victory, as with the vote tied 50-50, Vice president (and

presumptive nominee for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2000) Al Gore cast the tie breaking vote in favor, telling reporters afterwards "This is a turning point for our country" (Dewar and Eilperin 1999, 2).

Yet given that Senators are "freer to adjust their behavior in accordance with their own preferences and calculations of self-interest"[9] (Lee, 2009, 78) than members of the House, how did the Lautenberg amendment manage to secure the support of four Brady bill opponents? First, despite their individual electoral concerns, party members are aware that their electoral success is in part tied to the overall reputation of their party (Truman's (1959) concept of 'shared risk'). Thus in addition to their personal preferences, they have an electoral incentive in their party succeeding on agenda items, as legislative successes can create beneficial electoral spillovers for all party members. When Democrats held large majorities in both chambers and there was enough Democratic and Republican support to pass the Democratic gun control agenda during the 103rd Congress, red or high gun ownership state Democrats were freer to cross the party line- they could benefit from the party's legislative successes while protecting their individual electoral concerns. Yet when Democrats found themselves in the minority party, every vote was needed and opposition members faced increased pressure to rally behind the party cause. And critically, the electoral circumstances of the aforementioned Democrats at the time (with Breaux, Hollings, and Leahy having all comfortably won reelection bids the previous year and with Richard Bryan planning to retire in 2000) provided political leeway for them to do so. Given the totality of these circumstances, it is plausible that the support of these individuals had more to do with partisanship than with the contents of the legislation itself.

Overall, the Democratic unity shown in support of the Lautenberg amendment in the Senate was a noteworthy feat for a party often divided along regional lines, even leading Senator Joe Biden (DE) to proclaim "I just sense for the first time there's a real sea change" (Carney, 22 May 1999). Yet it was a unity that would be short lived, for as will be discussed in Chapter Six, a large group of Democrats who supported Lautenberg would vote for gun rights legislation in the following decade- their gun control support waning when the issue ceased to be electorally salient for the Democratic party. In recent years however, such unity

[9] Lee (2009) attributes this to the Senate's six-year Congressional terms and looser chamber rules.

has been seen again (as will be discussed in Chapter Seven), and under similar circumstances of minority party opposition.

The post Columbine debates: Conclusions

On May 20, 1999, the Senate voted 73-25 in favor of passing an omnibus juvenile crime bill which contained several gun control provisions, including a gun safety locks amendment, a ban on ammunition clips over ten rounds, and the strictest background check amendment that had been debated- the Lautenberg amendment. A month later, the House would pass their juvenile crime bill with no gun control provisions after the Mandatory Gun Show Background Check Act (an omnibus gun control bill voted on as part of the crime bill) was defeated 147-280 by a disparate coalition of pro-controllers who felt some of the bill's provisions (particularly the Dingell background checks amendment) were not strict enough and anti-controllers who had supported many of the amendments but were nonetheless content to see the main bill fail. In later months both chambers would attempt to negotiate a compromise bill at the Conference Committee to no avail; a juvenile crime bill thus never came to fruition.

Yet while the post Columbine debates ended in legislative stalemate, it was nonetheless clear that both crime and gun control remained issues of electoral concern for members of Congress. In terms of the salience of crime, that both chambers immediately began drafting juvenile crime bills as the backbone of the Congressional response to Columbine was significant; in later years, Congressional debates in response to mass shootings (if held at all) would not include 'tough on crime' provisions[10] or be part of a wider debate about crime. Despite the mass shooting focus at the end of the decade, the crime and gun control issues remained intertwined- in the words of Marge Roukema (R:NJ-5th) during the background check debates of 1999, "This issue is fundamentally about law and order...about keeping a convicted rapist, child molester, or any other felon from getting a gun (106th Cong. Rec. H4588 (1999)). In terms of gun control, that the anti-control Republican leadership were willing to draft (and most anti-controllers in Congress willing to support) any

[10] Provisions included within the House and Senate's juvenile crime bills included grants of 1.5 billion to the states for 'fighting crime,' funding for more drug testing in schools, a provision offering civil liability to school officials who discipline students, a provision providing prosecutorial discretion to U.S attorneys to try violent juvenile offenders as adults, and the creation of mandatory minimum sentences for youths convicted of violent crimes)(Carney June 5, 1999).

form of background checks legislation was noteworthy- and a sign that even those who typically opposed gun control sought political cover. With the Republican conference "all over the map" (in the words of House Majority Whip Tom DeLay) the leadership recognized that they needed a strategy of defense beyond limiting debate or blocking background check amendments outright. As DeLay explained "You hate to vote for any gun control if you're a defender of the Second Amendment. At the same time, what do you do to stop the gun control people?" (Mitchell and Bruni 1999, 2).

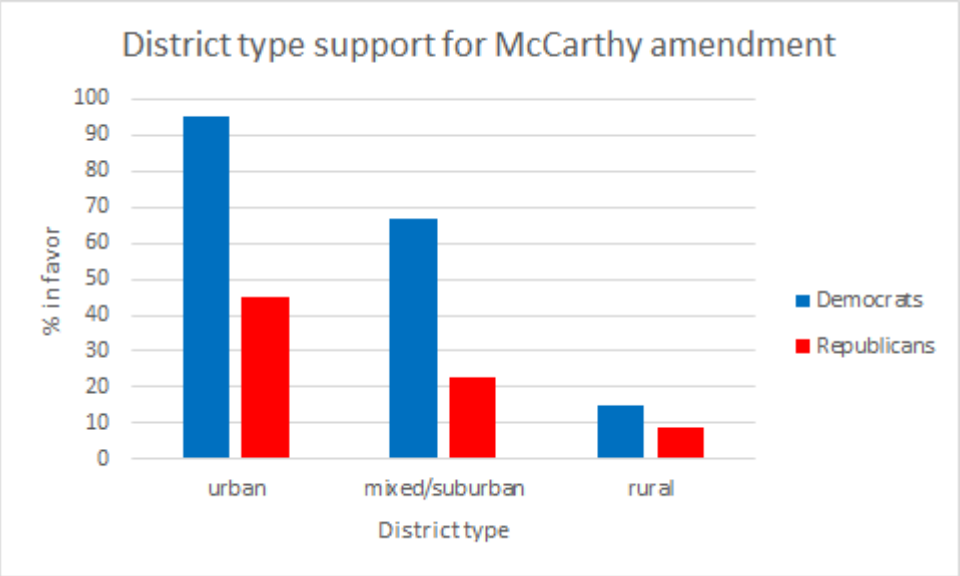
And compared to the present day when voting on any gun control, regardless of the specific legislative contents, is hyper polarized along party lines, during the post Columbine debates there was significant bipartisan compromise on certain gun control provisions, such as the Feinstein amendment (which banned ammunition clips carrying more than ten rounds and passed by unanimous consent in the Senate) and the Kohl and Davis amendments, which stipulated that all handguns be sold with child safety locks.

Table 7: Child safety lock amendments (1999)

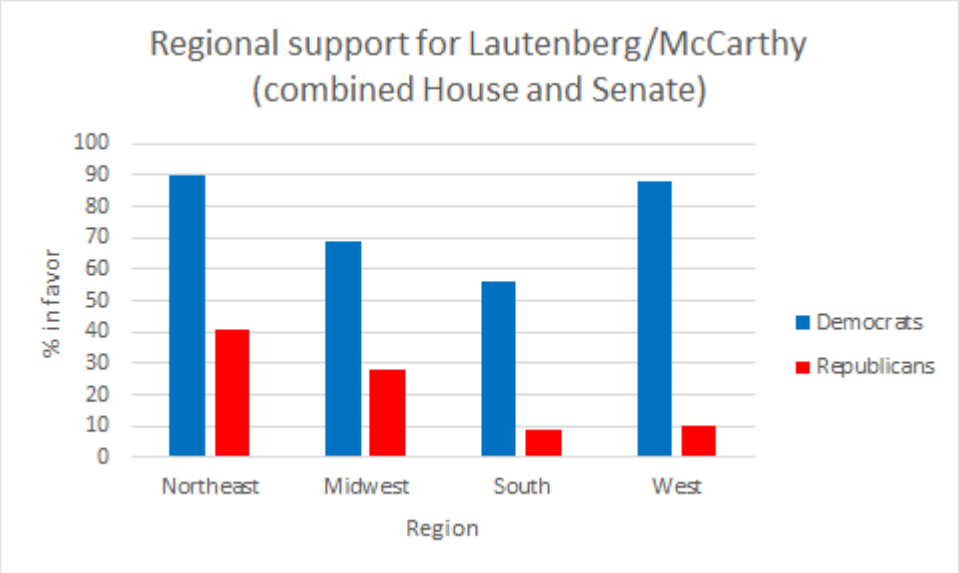
	Democrats	Republicans	Measure of Polarization*
Kohl Amendment (Senate) Passed 78-20	44 yes (98%) 1 no (2%)	34 yes (62%) 21 no (38%)	.36
Davis Amendment (House) Passed 311-115	190 yes (92%) 17 no (8%)	120 yes (55%) 98 no (45%)	.37

Overall, while the post Columbine background check votes were more polarized (mainly in the Senate) than the Brady bill votes of the 103rd Congress, there were still minority opposition groups within each party, with thirteen new pro-control Republicans (including National Republican Congressional Committee Chairman Tom Davis (VA-11th)) and fourteen anti-control Democrats having entered Congress over this timeframe. And critically, the district type and regional divides in party voting that were present during the previous debates remained- an indication that electoral pressures and incentives specific to district type/region were continuing to influence Congressional voting on the gun issue.

Graph 6: District type divides in party voting on the McCarthy amendment (House)



Graph 7: Regional divides in party voting on Lautenberg/McCarthy (combined House and Senate)



In conclusion, partisan polarization on gun control had increased by the end of the decade, due to replacement/regional realignment and the shifting of some opposition group members to vote the party line. Yet critically, the key changes in the electoral incentives of party members, changes which would eventually lead to the state of hyper polarization that exists in the present, had not yet occurred.

Chapter Six: The Republican shift

On a frequent basis beginning in late February 2004, representative Carolyn McCarthy (D:NY-4th) addressed her colleagues in the House. The topic each time was the pending September expiration of the federal Assault weapons ban, which had been enacted during the 103rd Congress with a ten-year sunset provision a decade prior. Aware that anti-control Republican House Majority leader Tom DeLay was uninterested in putting a renewal vote on the agenda, McCarthy spent the five minutes granted her to issue a call to the American public. "I ask the American people for help...The American people have to start emailing, they have to start faxing their representatives and say we want to keep the assault weapons ban in place. That is the only way that we can put pressure on this House to make sure it is coming up for a vote," McCarthy urged during one of her speeches (108th Cong. Rec. H2778 (2004)). Yet despite polling indicating that a majority of the public favored a renewal of the ban,[1] DeLay declined to call a vote, justifying his decision by telling reporters "the votes (to pass the renewal) are not there" (Babington 2004, 1). The Assault weapons ban would expire on September 13, 2004- ten years to the day that then-president Bill Clinton had signed it into law.

Just over two weeks later, DeLay would bring up the District of Columbia Personal Protection Act (a bill to reverse the ban on handgun ownership in Washington, D.C. that had been enacted in 1976) for consideration on the House floor, completely bypassing the Committee stage to do so five weeks before the 2004 Presidential and Congressional elections (Stern 2004). By allowing the Assault weapons ban to expire and immediately following up with a bill to, in the words of its primary sponsor Mark Souder (R: IN-3rd) "Restore the Second Amendment rights of D.C. citizens" (108th Cong. Rec. H7760 (2004)), DeLay was making an emphatic statement that foreshadowed the direction in which the Republican party was headed. As the rest of the chapter will demonstrate, by the 108th Congress (2003-2004) the Congressional Republican leadership was no longer primarily concerned with preventing the enactment of new gun control legislation, instead beginning

[1] For example, an NBC News/*The Wall Street Journal* poll from November 2003 asked respondents "About ten years ago, Congress banned the sale and manufacture of assault weapons. In your view, should Congress keep or end this ban?" 78 percent responded that the ban should be kept, compared to 16 percent who responded it should end and 5 percent who were unsure. Similarly, a *Time* Magazine/SRBI poll from October 2004 asked respondents "Ten years ago, Congress passed a law banning the sale and manufacture of semi-automatic assault weapons, except for use by the military and police. Do you favor this ban on assault weapons, or not?" 73 responded that they favored the ban, compared to 22 percent who did not and 4 percent who were unsure.

pursuit of a pro-gun rights agenda to roll back existing regulations and pass legislation to protect gun rights. The 2004 House vote on the DC Personal Protection Act would serve as a litmus test for the viability of such a pursuit, as an identical bill had been voted on during the post Columbine debates of June 1999 and had failed to pass by a significant margin. Five years later, would gun rights legislation be able to successfully pass in Congress? And if so, what implications would this have for partisan polarization on the gun control issue?

This chapter will analyze the Republican party's shift in favor of gun rights that occurred in the mid- 2000s. It will demonstrate that the Congressional Republican leadership took advantage of a window of political opportunity to begin pursuing gun rights legislation, and that with the fading of old electoral pressures and incentives and the growing significance of new ones, the party's pro-control minority opposition group dissolved as most of its remaining members embraced this gun rights agenda. This Republican shift would drive increasing partisan polarization on the issue even as Democratic support for gun rights also increased during this decade, after Democratic party leaders determined that gun control was no longer an electorally valuable, 'winning' issue for the party (for reasons which will be discussed). As a result, during this decade the Democratic anti-control minority opposition group would grow as the Republican pro-control group dissolved. Overall, with the dissolution of their party's opposition group occurring nearly a decade before the subsequent Democratic one, this Republican shift can be considered the triggering force behind the hyper partisan polarization that exists in the present.

Part I: The Republican gun rights pursuit

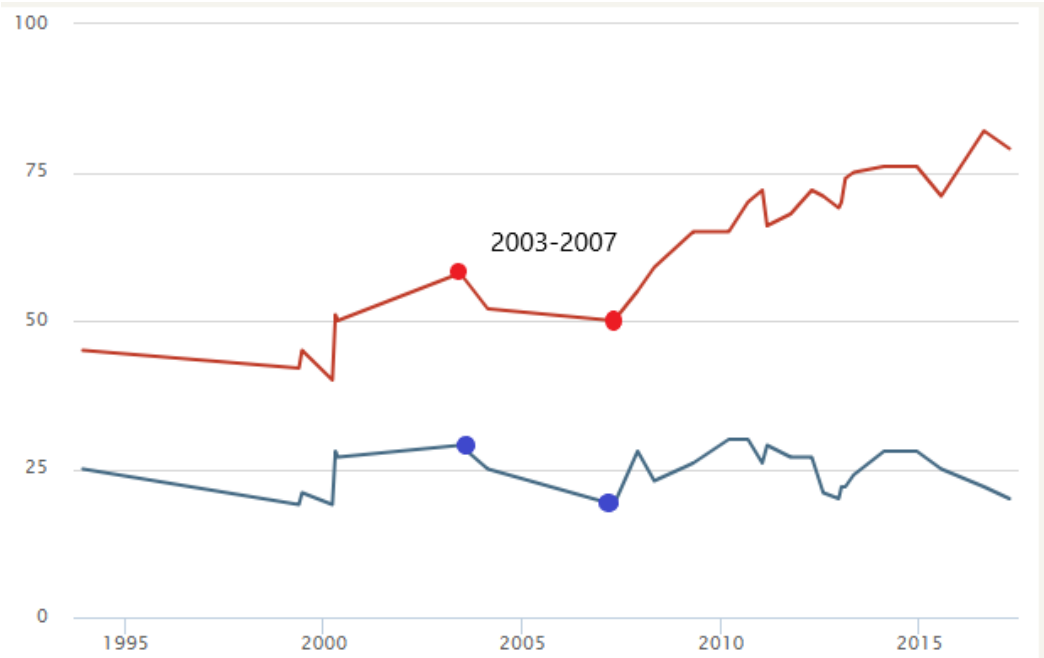
This chapter's analysis of the Republican shift in favor of gun rights begins with a question: what motivated the Congressional Republican leadership to begin agenda setting on gun rights during this timeframe? What role might the electorate, the NRA, president Bush, and the party majority have played in this pursuit?

The electorate

Was the Republican leadership facing significant pressure from the general electorate to legislate on gun rights? This did not appear to be the case. While the electorate did play an important role in the Republican party's shift (as will be explained later in the chapter), it was an indirect one. Beyond a poll from the Pew organization indicating there

was a slight increase in public support for gun rights between 2000 and 2003, there is no additional evidence (no polling data indicating gun rights had become an election issue or that the public had endorsed the specific legislation that was debated, no mention of a voter mandate from gun rights supporters in Congress during floor debates, no news media reporting on a shift in public opinion[2]) to indicate that the Republican leadership's agenda setting activities were a direct response to pressure from the public. Additionally, the aforementioned Pew poll also revealed that during the timeframe when Congress initially began debating and voting on such legislation (2003-2006) and again when the question was next posed in 2007, public support for gun rights declined. This suggests that such support during this period was variable, and that the previous uptick had not marked the beginning of a stable or steady increase in public support for gun rights.

Graph 1: Percentage of Democratic and Republican voters responding it was more important 'to protect gun rights than control gun ownership' (Pew)



Source: 'Gun rights versus gun control' (Pew Research Center).

And beyond the general electorate, the Republican party's shift in favor of gun rights occurred roughly four years before a marked increase in gun rights support amongst Republican voters began to emerge (2005 compared to 2009- see above graph). This lagging shift in the electorate is indicative of sorting- the process in which partisans, reacting to cues

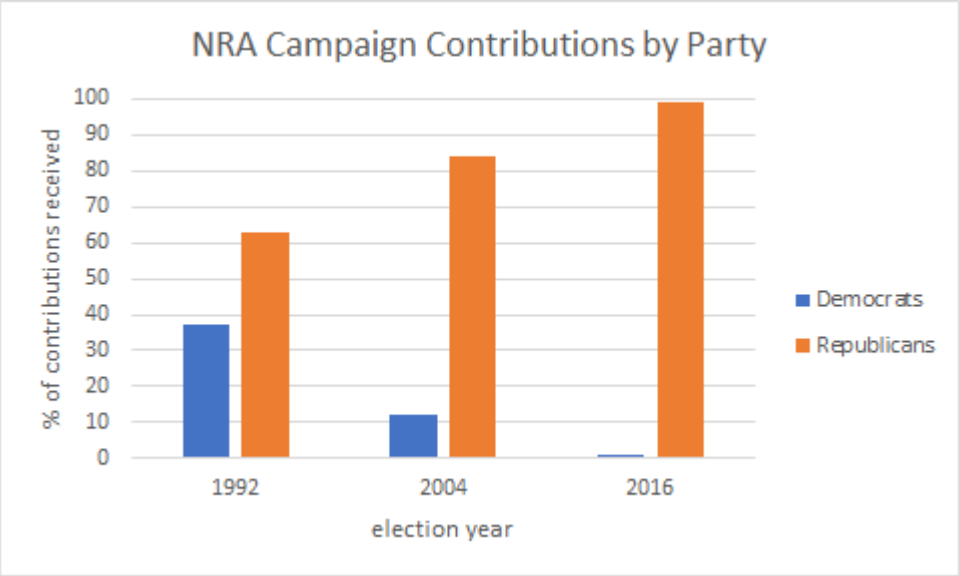
[2] In contrast to the abundance of such evidence which was used in previous chapters to build a case for the electoral significance of gun control as a means of combating crime in the 1990s.

from political elites, will bring their positions on an issue in line with their party identification (Jacoby 1988, Hetherington 2001, Carsey and Layman 2006, Levendusky 2009). As a final point, there is the Republican primary electorate to consider. As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, the primary electorate would play a crucial role in influencing Republican gun control voting after the debate was revitalized in late 2012. However, as will be discussed in later sections, this influence was just beginning to take root in the mid-2000s, and was not yet significant enough to have been the driving force. In summary, there is no compelling evidence of a direct causal arrow from a gun rights demanding electorate (general, Republican, or primary) to the Republican leadership's agenda setting activities.

The NRA

What role did the National Rifle Association play? While the NRA had long considered itself to be above partisan politics (see page 68), like any ambitious interest group/lobbying organization, they were highly opportunistic- and the Republican Revolution of 1994 opened a wide window of political opportunity. For the first time in nearly forty years, the party that had established itself in 1968 as the defender of Second Amendment rights had control of both chambers and the ability to agenda set, while its leadership was comprised of career anti-controllers already sympathetic to the NRA's agenda. It thus made sense politically for the NRA to begin focusing their resource allocation on the Republican party, who by that point clearly provided the best chance for the organization to achieve their policy goals at the Congressional level. Over time, the NRA would deliberately shift its resources to almost solely benefit Republicans, as is evident in the graph below. As Spitzer (2012) noted "this shift reflected the NRA's conscious decision to throw its lot in with the Republican party, which it viewed as far more friendly to its agenda" (Spitzer 2012, 97).

Graph 2: NRA campaign contributions by party



Source: The Center for Responsive Politics (2017)

Ultimately, while the organization wholeheartedly supported and worked with the Republican leadership in crafting their gun rights legislation, this collaboration was not the result of the NRA's purchasing of political loyalty (a theory which was discounted on page 72) or the organization having pressured the leadership into pursuing gun rights against their better electoral judgment. Rather, the relationship between the NRA and the Republican leadership can best be characterized as a political alliance forged in pursuit of mutual policy goals- to prevent the enactment of new gun controls and to pass legislation to protect gun rights.

President George W. Bush

Republican George W. Bush, who won the 2000 presidential election and took over after president Bill Clinton finished his second term, was a gun rights supporter who can be credited as a contributor to his party's agenda. Yet it would be inaccurate to view Bush as a key driving force behind it in the same way that former president Clinton was credited with convincing the Democratic leadership to make gun control a key component of the party's anti-crime package during the 103rd Congress. For while he had been a supporter of gun rights throughout his political career, during the 108th Congress (2003-2004) Bush was

campaigning for reelection and was publicly treading lightly in regard to the gun issue;[3] meanwhile, House Majority leader Tom DeLay was making unequivocally pro-gun rights moves such as letting the Assault weapons ban expire and putting the DC handgun ban repeal on the House floor two weeks later. That the Congressional leadership and the president were sometimes at odds was evident when DeLay stated that he had no plans to bring up an Assault weapons ban renewal vote, despite the Bush administration's endorsement of its reauthorization the previous year (Dloughy 2004). When asked about this discrepancy within the party, DeLay would tell reporters "If the president asked me, it would still be no. We don't have the votes...It will expire Monday, and that's that" (Harkinson 2011, 1). But while president Bush was not the driving force, it is important to recognize that despite his pre-election moderation, he was ultimately a career gun rights supporter who would sign into law all the gun rights legislation that crossed his desk in the following years. Thus his presidency itself eliminated a critical barrier (the presidential veto) which had previously stood in the way of a Republican gun rights pursuit.

The party majority

Since the starting point of the thesis's analysis (the 103rd Congress of 1993-1994) the majority of Congressional Republicans have been anti-controllers. Thus the leadership's interest in gun rights was in line with that of the party majority, who would be content to rally behind this agenda. Yet considering that their official role is to act as agents of the party majority[4] (Cooper and Brady 1981, Cox and McCubbins 1993, Sinclair 2006, Smith 2007), to what extent was the leadership agenda setting on their behalf? If the party majority had been pushing for the specific gun rights legislation that was ultimately debated, one would expect to find evidence in the years prior of public statements such as press releases, news media interviews, and remarks on the floor of both chambers urging that the bills be considered (similar to Carolyn McCarthy's weekly pleas that an Assault weapons ban renewal vote be brought). If the party majority had been mobilizing for a gun rights push generally, one would expect to find evidence of gun rights supporters in Congress holding committee hearings on gun rights bills, or introducing a plethora of gun

[3] That Bush was concerned about the gun control issue during this campaign was evident during the third televised presidential debate, when he was confronted about the expiration of the Assault weapons ban that had occurred that September. In discussing it, Bush absolved himself of responsibility and instead cast the blame on both parties, telling the audience "I did think we ought to extend the assault weapons ban, and was told the fact that the bill was never going to move, because Republicans and Democrats were against the assault weapon ban, people of both parties" (Commission on Presidential Debates, October 13, 2004).

[4] For a discussion of the Congressional leadership behavior literature refer to page 39.

rights legislation in the years leading up to the leadership's decision to begin agenda setting. Yet there is scant evidence of such mobilization prior to the bills being introduced, only of a galvanized and supportive party majority after the fact (for example as numerous members passionately endorsed them during floor debate).

In terms of the first two gun rights bills that would be considered, the leadership's interest in the gun liability bill was reported to have been piqued by the NRA, who had for several years been working with state legislators to see similar legislation passed at the state level (Dloughy 2004, Stolberg 2005, Spitzer 2012). Meanwhile, many attributed the hasty movement of the DC handgun ban repeal to the House floor not to pressure from the party majority, but as a move by Majority leader Tom DeLay to both make a pro-gun rights statement and put House members on the record on the gun issue a month before the 2004 elections.[5]

Additionally, while they provided an easy opportunity for position taking, these initial bills were not necessarily the sort that one would expect to be a political priority for the party majority given the long awaited opportunity to see gun rights legislation signed into law. For in many respects, they were of greater symbolic than practical significance for their constituents. For example, repealing the ban on handgun ownership in Washington, D.C. was a bold move to "restore the Second Amendment rights of D.C citizens" (108th Cong. Rec. H7760 (2004)) that would have no legislative impact on the constituencies of most House members (except perhaps for representatives whose districts bordered the city), the district itself not even having a voting member in Congress. Likewise, while the gun liability bill was sold as a bill necessary to "safeguard Second Amendment rights" (109th Cong. Rec. S1906 (2005)) by preventing gun manufacturers from being sued into bankruptcy by victims of gun violence (thus ensuring continued public access to firearms), the number and cost of lawsuit payouts hadn't been anywhere near significant enough to impact the stock of gun manufacturers or curb public access to firearms. Thus beyond victims of gun violence who would be denied their day in court or constituents that worked for gun manufacturers, the impact of the bill's passage on the average American would be

[5] For example, Amy Walter of the Cook Political Report stated "For House Democrats sitting in rural or conservative districts who are worried about being labeled as culturally out of step with their districts, this is their one opportunity to make a vote on the gun issue and cement their image among voters" (Hsu 2004, 1). Even some House representatives would claim that the vote was a statement making exercise for the Republican leadership, Jesse Jackson (D:IL-2nd) telling the floor "Let's be clear. They are forcing us to vote on this legislation in order to politicize the gun issue and make a statement on the eve of the election in order to send a political message back home (108th Cong. Rec. H7746 (2004)).

more or less imperceptible, particularly in comparison to later gun rights legislation (such as concealed carry reciprocity and legislation to allow firearms on Amtrak trains and in national parks) which would have a more tangible and practical impact on the lives of gun owners.

In conclusion, while absence of evidence (particularly without the benefit of insider access to the party) does not rule out the possibility that party leaders were responding to specific pressure from the party majority to legislate on gun rights, there is a more plausible explanation that does not negate the importance of the party majority.

The leadership

While the electorate, the NRA, president Bush, and the party majority all had a role to play in the decision to begin agenda setting on gun rights, no one source can be isolated as a direct driving force behind it. So what then motivated the leadership? I contend that the leadership's role can best be understood as taking the initiative on behalf of themselves and the party majority, making a bold pro-gun rights statement in the process. By starting with two controversial pieces of legislation with major symbolic significance for gun rights and making assertive agenda setting moves (such as exerting tight control over both bills by bypassing the Committee stage and using House/Senate rules to bar amendments and limit debate), the leadership was flexing their political muscle, signaling to party activists, gun issue groups, Democrats, and the general public that the Republican party was pursuing such an agenda because they wanted to and because they could. This interpretation fits with both the leadership's known ideological affinity for gun rights and with their decisive agenda setting/procedural tactics and commanding reputation generally during this timeframe.

Fervent gun rights supporters

The Republican leadership during this timeframe was comprised of veteran anti-controllers. Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert, House Majority leaders Richard Armey (until 2003) and Tom DeLay (2003-2005), House Minority Whip Roy Blunt, Senate Majority leader Bill Frist, and Senate Majority Whip Mitch McConnell all had at least career 'A' (94 percent or above) ratings from the National Rifle Association; during the

108th Congress (2003-2004) their combined average of 97 percent (A) was higher than the Republican party average of 85 (B+).[6]

And critically, beyond their voting records and NRA ratings, most of these leaders (with the exception of Hastert, who was known for refraining from making statements about his personal beliefs on issues)(Strahan 2007, Green 2010) were also publicly outspoken in their opposition to gun control/support for gun rights- often indicating that their positions on the issue were a matter of personal belief. For example, in his 1995 book *The Freedom Revolution,* then House Majority leader Richard 'Dick' Armey cited his desire to protect the Second Amendment as part of his personal political philosophy, writing that "the rights of law abiding gun owners should be unquestioned" (Armey, 1995, 244). In an interview with NRA Institute for Legislative Action Executive Director Chris Cox in 2003, Senate Majority leader Bill Frist touted his lifelong support for gun rights, stating "I personally believe that a law-abiding citizen should have the right to keep and bear arms with the most minimal interference from local, state, or federal government," (NRA-ILA 2003) while in a letter to his constituents, Senate Majority Whip Mitch McConnell referred to the enactment of gun control as both a national and personal threat, calling it "an assault on our rights. On our freedom" (Wing 2013, 1).

Tom DeLay

The most outspoken gun rights supporter in the leadership at this time was House Majority leader Tom DeLay (who succeeded the aforementioned Dick Armey to the position in 2003). Speaking at the NRA's annual convention in his home state of Texas in 2005, DeLay referred to the Second Amendment as a God given right, telling the audience "It is our freedom...God gave it. The Constitution preserves it. And together we will defend it" (Gold 2005, 2). Six years earlier during the post Columbine gun control debates, DeLay had given an impassioned and memorable speech on the House floor in which he cast blame for gun violence in schools on American culture, stating "Guns have little or nothing to do with juvenile violence. The causes of youth violence are working parents who put their kids into daycare, the teaching of evolution in the schools, and working mothers who take birth control pills" (106th Cong. Rec. H4569 (1999)). When the omnibus gun control bill being

[6] The Republican average of 85 (B+) in 2004 was notably higher than the party's average of 73 (C) during the 103rd Congress (1993-1994)- the latter an average driven down by a group of Republicans receiving zero's (F) from the organization during that timeframe. For an explanation of the NRA rating system refer to page 14.

considered by the House during these debates failed to pass, DeLay referred to it as "a great personal victory" (Henneburger 1999, 3).

And beyond his outspokenness, DeLay had also established himself as the Republican leader pulling the strings on the gun issue during the aforementioned debates. As discussed in Chapter Five, DeLay (who was at the time Majority Whip) subverted Speaker Hastert by tasking anti-control Democrat John Dingell (MI-15th) with drafting a comparatively weaker gun control amendment in the House to be voted on alongside Hastert's; it was a strategy that proved successful, as DeLay's amendment passed while both the strictest McCarthy amendment and Hastert's compromise amendment failed. This outcome was a stark indication that DeLay's influence over the gun issue often surpassed that of the Speaker, which is in line with his general reputation as a strong willed and highly skilled party leader who was often credited with exercising more influence in the House than Hastert (Dubose and Reid 2004, Hohler 1999, Green 2010), who himself was known for his "relaxed style and low profile" (Strahan 2007, 121). And Hastert wasn't the only ranking superior in the party whom DeLay was willing to subvert when it came to the gun issue, as was evident when he told reporters he would not bring the Assault weapons ban renewal up for a vote even if the president asked him to (Dloughy 2004). Throughout his tenure as a member of the House Republican leadership, DeLay often took it upon himself to take command of the party's handling of the gun issue; as will be seen throughout the Chapter, he would be one of the most vocal and visible leaders during the initial gun rights push.

Initiative taking behavior

As discussed in the literature review chapter (see page 39), while the classic works tend to view Congressional leaders as more or less constrained by the will of the party majority (Jones 1968, Cooper and Brady 1981, Cox and McCubbins 1993, Sinclair 1999), more recent work on Congressional leadership behavior lends increasing significance to the role that the ambitions of specific party leaders play in terms of what legislation is pursued. Scholars of this viewpoint contend that party leaders can be causal agents as well as causal followers (Jacobs et al 1998, Mayhew 2000, Schickler 2001, Strahan 2007, Evans and Grandy 2009, Green 2010), and that certain party leaders will be willing to take political risks to advance personal legislative goals- particularly if these goals are electoral (impacting their reelection prospects), but also those related to their personal political

philosophy, concerns about enacting good public policy, or concerns about their future legacies/reputations (Strahan 2007, Green 2010). This viewpoint helps to explain why the leadership would take the initiative in the absence of direct pressure from the party majority to legislate on specific proposals- in other words, they acted because they had the desire (as gun rights supporters), the means (agenda setting control), and critically, the political opportunity (as will be discussed in part II).

Leadership style

Additionally, more recent scholarship has argued for the importance of personality and leadership style, which is critical to how successfully leaders are able to navigate within and around institutional and political constraints to achieve desired outcomes (Rohde 2000, Strahan 2007, Evans and Grandy 2009, Green 2010). As Rohde (2000) writes "The personality and skills of leaders play a significant role" (212) in determining leadership power. As will be demonstrated later in the chapter, the Republican leadership acted boldly and decisively to implement their agenda, adopting a procedural style that kept gun control supporters at bay and which was critical for the successful passage of the bills. Yet their behavior was not an anomaly which suggested they were responding to some form of heightened pressure, but rather was emblematic of their agenda setting style and assertive reputation generally during this timeframe, perhaps most notably epitomized in their handling of the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act of 2003.

The Medicare bill, which amongst its key provisions included an entitlement benefit for prescription drugs, was a key pre-election agenda item of President Bush. The leadership did everything in their power to aid its passage, including working to ensure that the House Rules Committee implemented a closed rule (so no amendments could be added to the bill), that all amendments offered by Democrats were voted down in the Senate Committee, and that no Democrats were on the Conference Committee to iron out differences between the House and Senate bills (Dubose and Reid 2004, Sinclair 2006). Yet despite their efforts to block Democratic input and their majority control of both chambers, as the final Conference Committee vote drew to a close in the House, the bill was failing by three votes- the obstacle a group of staunchly conservative holdouts who viewed the Medicare expansion as too expensive. In what was described as "one of the most contentious floor votes ever seen" (Dubose and Reid 2004, 278) the Republican leadership (Speaker Dennis Hastert, Majority leader Tom DeLay, and Majority Whip Roy Blunt) left

the vote open, angled the C-SPAN cameras away, and at three o'clock in the morning took to the House floor to convince three Republicans to change their votes. After what was described by *The New York Times* as "an extraordinary bout of Republican arm twisting" (Pear and Toner 2003, 1) the leadership convinced two members to switch votes, and a few others followed. The Medicare bill would pass by a final vote of 220-215, in the longest open vote in the history of the House (Broder 2003, Pear and Toner 2003).

As the rest of the chapter will demonstrate, the Republican leadership did not have to take to the House or Senate floor to flip party members during the gun rights debates, as not only was the party unified in support of their agenda, but they had enough Democratic support to comfortably pass both bills. Yet the procedural style they used to assert tight control over the debate would be markedly similar. Overall, the bold agenda setting displayed in pursuit of gun rights was characteristic of the leadership's reputation at the time, as they used any and all procedural means and tactics at their disposal to achieve legislative victories- whether on behalf of their president, the party majority, or themselves.

"It's time to set things right"

In the absence of compelling evidence of pressure placed on the leadership by the electorate or the party majority and with president Bush treading lightly around the issue, the Republican leadership's initial gun rights pursuit can most accurately be viewed as an initiative taking move which made a bold pro-gun rights statement on behalf of the Republican party. In defense of their respective decisions to put the DC handgun ban repeal and the gun liability bill up for a vote on the House and Senate floor, both House Majority leader Tom DeLay and Senate Majority leader Bill Frist implied that they were taking action to protect gun rights because it was overdue. DeLay would tell reporters "For years, Americans citizens in Washington, D.C., have had their right to self-protection denied them, and it's time to set things right" (Stolberg 2004, 2), while Frist, setting aside the $491 billion defense spending bill that the Senate was considering to call a vote on the gun liability bill, stated that "immediate action" was needed to curtail the effects of frivolous lawsuits because "if the gun industry is forced into bankruptcy, the 'right to keep and bear arms,' will be a right in name only" (109th Cong. Rec. S8913 (2005)).

This leadership driven interpretation is perhaps best contextualized with the words of Tom DeLay, speaking generally about the Republican majority leadership in the post Republican Revolution era: "You've got to understand, we are ideologues. We have an

agenda. We have a philosophy. I want to repeal the Clean Air Act. No one came to me and said 'please repeal the Clean Air Act.' We say to the lobbyists: help us. We know what we want to do and we find the people that help us do that" (Dubose and Reid 2004, 96). Yet if the Republican leadership were in fact ideologues, why, despite being fervent gun rights supporters, did they wait almost a decade after gaining majority control of Congress to begin pursuing gun rights? Why did it take so long for them to begin to "set things right"?

Part II: Gun rights and political opportunity

The Republican leadership's decision to begin agenda setting on gun rights was a notable shift in strategy from the previous decade, when despite gaining majority control of Congress and the ability to agenda set in 1995, they had primarily focused on a defensive strategy to prevent the enactment of new gun controls. Why had this been the case? While the Republican leadership may have been ideologues with an agenda as Tom DeLay once proclaimed, even ideologues find themselves constrained by political and institutional barriers outside their control.

President Clinton

To start, there was the fact that despite their newfound status as majority party leaders, Democratic pro-controller Bill Clinton remained in the White House. Clinton's veto power was a major institutional roadblock to the enactment of gun rights legislation, and it was a power he had threatened to use in 1996 when the House voted on an Assault weapons ban repeal. Yet while a significant barrier to implementation, there was nothing preventing the leadership from bringing gun rights legislation to the House or Senate floor as a symbolic, statement making exercise. So why refrain from making such a statement?

The salience of crime and a strategy of defense

As has been argued throughout the thesis, the salience of crime as a priority political issue elevated the electoral significance of gun control for many members of Congress (and particularly urban representatives, suburban representatives adjacent to urban areas, and Senators in states with large urban areas) who faced pressure to support it to appear 'tough on crime' throughout the 1990s. Given the electoral relevance of the crime and gun control issues, the pro-gun rights leadership chose to tread carefully around the issue, making their primary focus a defensive strategy to prevent the enactment of new gun controls.

As discussed in Chapter Five, a gun rights platform had not been part of the Contract with America written for the 1994 midterm election campaign, as, with polling indicating that crime was the 'most important problem' concerning the public in 1994 and with a majority reporting they believed gun control was a crucial component of crime control, incorporating gun rights would have been too politically risky, and these leaders were consciously avoiding "electorally dangerous" issues and focusing on provisions which would have broad bipartisan appeal for the public (Ashford 1998, 102).

Even after gaining majority control of Congress for the first time in nearly forty years during the 1994 midterm elections (Shafer 1998), the Republican leadership would not take advantage of their newfound agenda setting opportunity to pursue gun rights during this decade- the exception being a 1996 House vote to repeal the Assault weapons ban, which was the fulfillment of a pre-election promise to the NRA (who had provided significant financial support to Republican candidates) that the leadership would bring a repeal vote to the House floor in place of including it within the Contract with America. Ultimately it was a move deemed to be "laden with greater political than legislative significance" ("House Votes to Repeal Assault Weapons Ban" in *CQ Almanac 1996*), as House leaders were aware that Senate Majority leader Bob Dole (who was seeking the Republican nomination for president) had stated that bringing a similar repeal to the Senate floor was "not a priority" (Green 1996, 1) while president Clinton had promised to veto any such bill that crossed his desk (Drew 1996).

The Republican leadership's defensive strategy during this decade was most markedly on display during the post Columbine gun control debates of June 1999. With polling indicating that crime remained the 'most important problem' concerning voters in 1998 and with additional polling revealing an uptick in public support for gun control in response to the Columbine shooting, gun control remained an issue of electoral concern for many members of Congress. As a result, the leadership's strategy was not simply to block gun control amendments outright, but to offer their own, comparatively weaker background check amendments to be voted on, with the goal of peeling away votes from the strictest amendments on offer. It was a strategy of damage control; a concession that if gun control was going to pass, then a weaker amendment was better than a stricter one. The fact that veteran anti-controllers in the leadership were drafting and voting for gun control amendments was highly significant; they were strategizing to achieve the best possible

outcome given the political circumstances they were facing. As Tom DeLay put it "You hate to vote for any gun control if you're a defender of the Second Amendment. At the same time, what do you do to stop the gun control people?" (Mitchell and Bruni 1999, 2).

A window of political opportunity opens

According to political opportunity theory, an activist or political actors prospects for advancing a particular cause and what political strategies and tactics are chosen in pursuit of this cause is largely dependent upon the political context in which they operate (Eisinger 1973, Tilly 1978, McAdam 1982, Costain 1992, Kriesi et al 1995, Meyer 2004). When the Republican leadership shifted from a defensive strategy to prevent the enactment of new gun controls to an offensive one to pursue legislation to protect gun rights, how had their political circumstances and the national political climate changed?

First, a crucial institutional barrier to the implementation of a gun rights agenda had been removed, as president Clinton finished his second term and was replaced by Republican George W. Bush, who had defeated former Democratic vice president Al Gore in the 2000 presidential election. Bush was a gun rights supporter who could be counted upon to sign into law any gun rights bills that came before his desk, meaning the threat of a presidential veto was no longer an impediment.

The declining salience of crime

And perhaps most critically, in the years since the post Columbine gun control debates of June 1999, the political context had changed significantly. While crime remained a prominent issue during the 2000 presidential campaign and retained a higher position than both healthcare and the economy in Gallup's ' most important problem' poll that year (see graph on page 152), the decline of crime as a priority political issue was expedited by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001- the event itself and aftermath of which would preoccupy national concern and shape Congressional debate throughout the decade, and especially during its first half. In the following years, Congress was focused on passing legislation to strengthen national security and prevent future terrorist attacks, passing the PATRIOT Act (which in practice was effectively anti-crime legislation, although it was

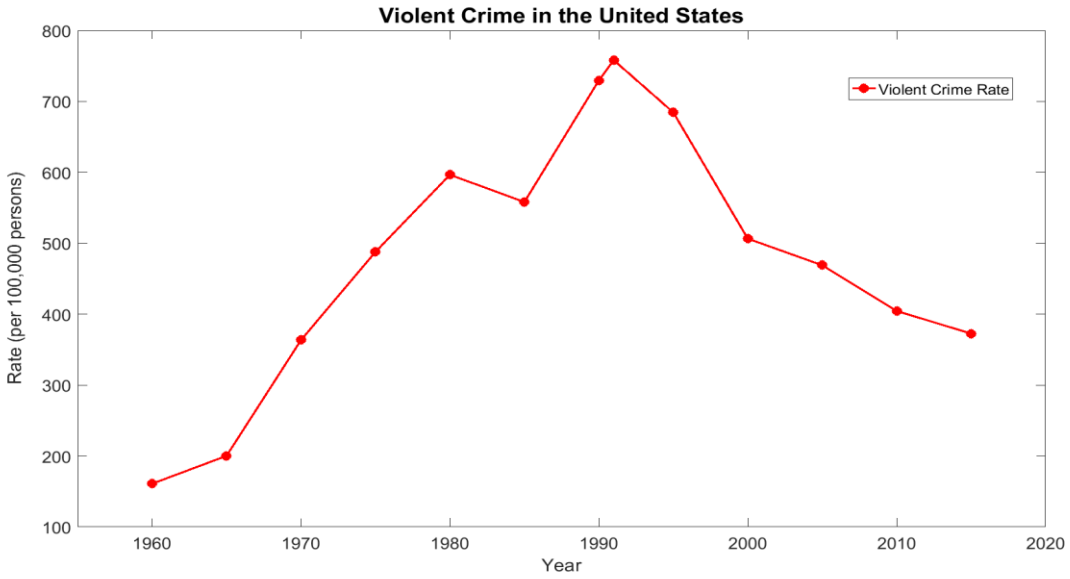
debated as an anti-terrorism bill)[7] on October 26 of that year, with the Homeland Security Act[8] following in November of 2002. National and Congressional attention during this timeframe was also focused on the Bush Administration's post 9/11 military interventions, beginning with the invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. In October 2002, Congress passed the Iraq Resolution with strong bipartisan support, authorizing the use of American military force against Iraq in support of the Bush Administration's contention that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and posed an imminent threat to the United States. The invasion of Iraq would commence on March 20, 2003 (Sanger and Burns 2003).

In the aftermath of the deadliest terrorist attack on American soil and amidst the two wars that followed the event in quick succession, that concerns about terrorism, national security, and foreign policy relegated the domestic crime issue to the political back burner was intelligible- particularly considering that crime rates had continued to fall since the national violent crime rate peaked in 1991.

[7] The Patriot Act amended numerous federal statutes in order to "deter and punish terrorist attacks in the United States and around the world" and "to enhance law enforcement investigatory tools" (Public Law 107-56, 18 USC). The Act included provisions to increase FBI funding for terrorist screenings and grant federal immigration officials enhanced detention powers; the most controversial provisions involved the expansion of surveillance and wiretapping powers.

[8] The Homeland Security Act created the Department of Homeland Security, a cabinet Department to protect the U.S from terrorist attacks and natural disasters by consolidating several federal agencies under one Department. It includes within it the U.S Customs and Border Protection agency, U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services, the U.S Coast Guard, and the U.S Secret Service (Public Law 107-296, 116 Statute 2135).

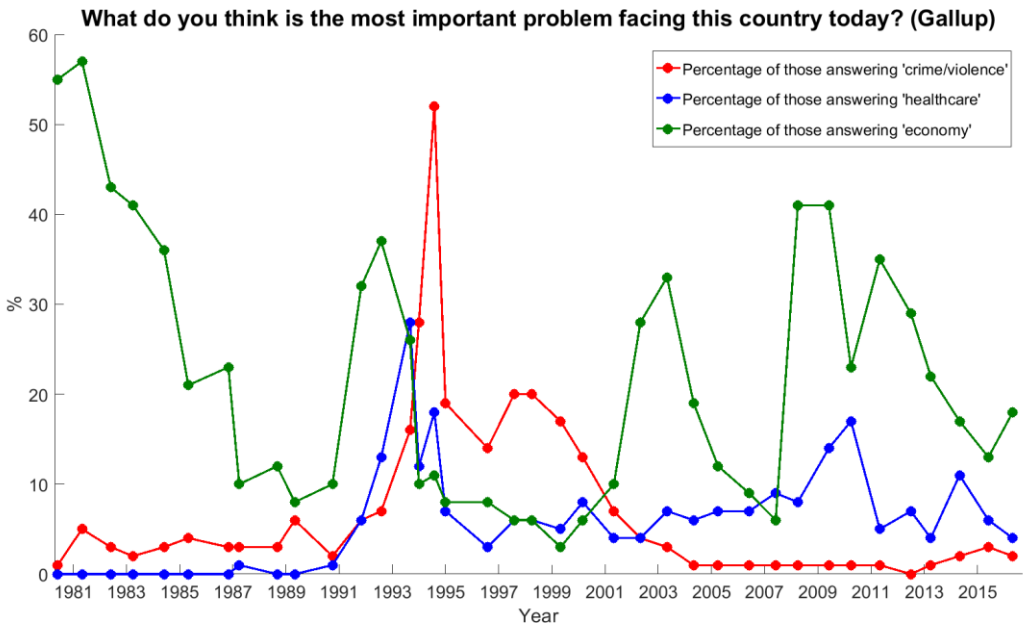
Graph 3: Violent crime in the United States



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports.

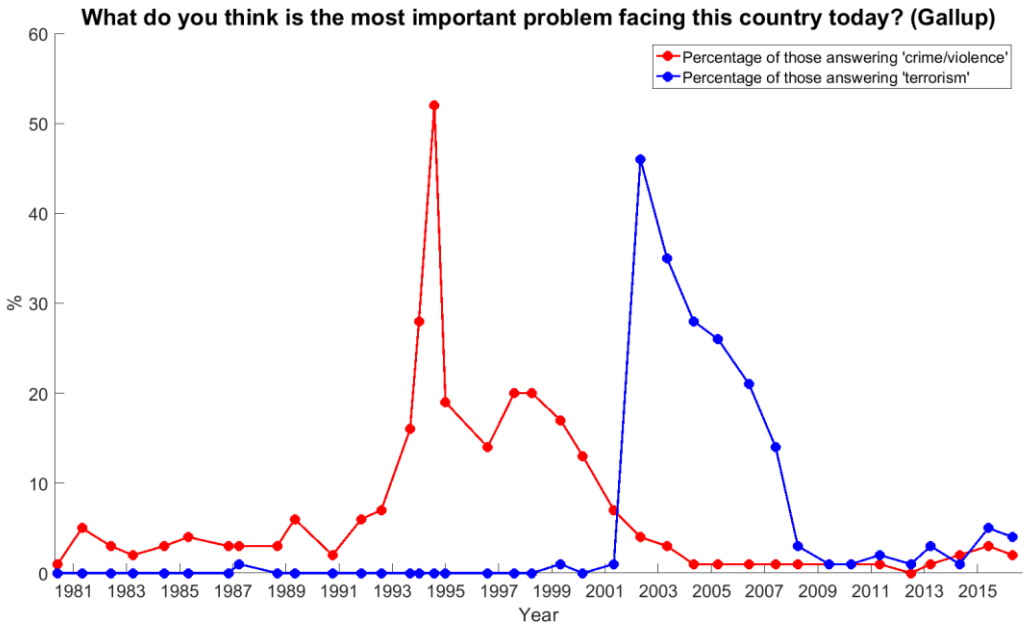
Additionally, while not quite reaching the salience level of terrorism, the economy would also surpass crime as a political priority for Congress (or at least for president Bush and Congressional Republicans). With a recession hitting in the early 2000s (Henderson 2004) and Bush's economic agenda (the Bush tax cuts of 2001 and 2003) dominating the Congressional domestic agenda in the early 2000s, the economy would surpass crime in Gallup's 'most important problem' poll for the first time in nearly a decade in 2001.

Graph 4: 'Most important problem' (Crime/Healthcare/Economy)



Several polls taken during this timeframe indicated that the public was more concerned with both terrorism and the economy than the domestic crime issue in the wake of the September 11th attacks. An October 2001 Gallup poll taken a month after the attacks predictably revealed that 47 percent of respondents reported they frequently or occasionally worried about being a victim of terrorism, compared to 23 percent who worried about being a victim of domestic crimes such as burglary or assault. In May of 2002, the Gallup organization would report that the 'most important problem' concerning Americans was terrorism (with 48 percent of respondents citing it as the most important issue, compared to 29 percent who cited the economy and only 4 percent who cited crime/violence). For the crime issue, this was a significant drop from the previous decade, when crime had consistently been in the top three and had twice held the top position (in 1994 and 1998); a decade when terrorism did not register as a concern for voters. Ultimately, with crime rates and public concerns about crime declining and the issues of terrorism and national security (and to a lesser extent, the economy) taking center stage, crime would lose its status as a priority political issue in the early 2000s, having been replaced by terrorism as the 'most important problem' facing the country.

Graph 5: Most important problem (Crime vs. terrorism)



The decline of crime and gun control

Why is the decline in the electoral significance of crime relevant for understanding the Republican gun rights pursuit? As discussed in Chapter Three, while since the advent of modern polling there had been "remarkable consistency" in majority public support for stricter government regulation of firearms (Spitzer 2012, 118), gun control had never been a priority political issue for the public in its own right- for example never having been top or near the top of the Gallup organization's list of 'most important' issues. Crime, on the other hand, had been- and as the issues became interconnected (with crime rates, public concerns about crime, and public support for gun control all peaking within a three year timeframe- see graph on page 56) and a majority of the public reported they believed gun control was a crucial component of crime control, the salience of crime had elevated the electoral significance of gun control. Thus due to their intertwined relationship, when the political and electoral relevance of crime faded, that of gun control faded with it. While not explicitly abandoning support for gun control, the public became more concerned with other issues, such as terrorism and the economy. This point is critical, for implicit support for an issue needs to be backed by a galvanized public (one that considers it to be a political priority and an election issue) for that issue to translate into one of major electoral concern for members of Congress. In other words, while support for gun control itself remained stable, the salience of the issue for voters declined.

Gun rights and political opportunity: Conclusions

The presidential election victory of Republican George W. Bush in 2000 and the fading political and electoral significance of the crime issue in the early 2000s lifted two critical barriers that had previously discouraged the Republican leadership from pursuing gun rights. Having a Republican president sympathetic to the gun rights cause removed a key institutional barrier to implementation (the presidential veto), while the decline of crime and the rise of terrorism weakened the electoral salience of the gun control issue, making a gun rights pursuit less politically and electorally risky. Ultimately, both of these changes opened a window of political opportunity for the Republican leadership to begin pursuit of a long desired gun rights agenda on behalf of the party. The shift from a defensive to an offensive strategy and the bold procedural moves undertaken strongly indicated that the leadership was no longer concerned about the potential for a bold gun rights position to be electorally damaging; "stopping the gun control people" (Mitchell and Bruni 1999, 2) no

longer appeared to be the main priority for these self-professed advocates of gun rights. But how would Congress respond to the leadership's pursuit? And what (if any) impact would the decline of crime have on partisan polarization on the gun issue? The rest of the chapter aims to answer these questions.

Part III. The District of Columbia Personal Protection Act (House)

On September 29, 2004, two weeks after the expiration of the federal Assault weapons ban and five weeks before the 2004 Congressional and presidential elections, House Majority leader Tom DeLay called up the District of Columbia Personal Protection Act for consideration on the House floor, completely bypassing the Committee stage in the process.[9] The Act sought to (in the words of gun rights supporter Ron Paul (R:TX-14th) "restore the Federal government's respect for the right to bear arms" (108th Cong. Rec. H7774 (2004)) by lifting the ban on private ownership of handguns and their ammunition that had existed in Washington, D.C. since 1976. The ban had been enacted by the D.C. City Council and the Mayor- elected officials who were authorized through the Congressional Home Rule Act to pass legislation governing the city (Hsu 2004). The Act would also allow residents to legally purchase semi-automatic weapons that were not prohibited by federal law, eliminate the requirement for citizens to register their firearms with the District, and abolish the requirement that rifles (which were legal) in the home be kept disassembled and locked up at all times (Stern 2004). Working to ensure that no steps could be taken by pro-controllers to weaken the legislation, the Republican majority House Committee on Rules (which acts as "the arm of the leadership " by setting the conditions for debate and determining what (if any) amendments will be considered)(Sinclair 2006, 169) implemented a closed rule, rejecting the consideration of any amendments to the bill.

During floor debate, proponents of the legislation argued that the D.C. handgun ban was unconstitutional because it denied certain citizens their Second Amendment right to bear arms. As representative Ginny Brown-Waite (R:FL-5th) proclaimed "the Constitution clearly prohibits the Federal Government from denying law-abiding citizens...the right to own and bear arms. Yet the residents in our Nation's capital are deprived of this right" (108th Cong.

[9] Unlike most legislation that reaches the House floor, no hearings were held or markups made at the Committee stage, (including from the Committee on Government Reform, under whose jurisdiction the legislation fell) (Stern 2004).

Rec. H7765 (2004)). Opponents of the Act disagreed, asserting that repealing the gun control laws of Washington, D.C. was not a decision to be made by Congress, for the Congressional Home Rule Act left such decisions up to the D.C. City Council and Mayor. Eleanor Holmes-Norton (D), the non-voting representative of the District of Columbia's at large Congressional district, stated that "This matter has been settled by the people of the District of Columbia, who alone have the right to make decisions as to how to safeguard their lives" (108th Cong. Rec. H7744 (2004)). The jurisdictional question, and not the efficacy of the ban as a crime reduction tool, was the primary focus for pro-controllers during the debate- a notable indication that the political relevance of the crime issue had faded.

The roll call vote

Returning to the concept of political opportunity, party leaders design political strategies and determine which policy agendas to pursue in part by anticipating the electoral calculations of legislators (Arnold 1990, Strahan 2007). By beginning to agenda set on gun rights, the Republican leadership was expressing confidence that they could secure the votes needed for the legislation to pass (what is referred to in the House as the 'Hastert rule'[10]). Bringing up this particular bill was itself a display of confidence, for incidentally, the fall of 2004 was not the first time that the House had voted on legislation to repeal the District of Columbia's handgun ban. During the post Columbine juvenile crime/gun control debates of June 1999, a virtually identical bill known as the Goode Amendment (sponsored by Virgil Goode (VA-5th), an anti-control Democrat who became a Republican in 2002) had been voted on as an amendment to the Mandatory Gun Show Background Check Act. At the time, it had failed by a significant margin- 175-250. How would the same legislation fare five years later?

A shift in favor of gun rights

Given the Hastert rule, the Republican House leadership was unlikely to bring up a controversial piece of legislation so close to an election if they believed there was a reasonable chance of it failing, and their confidence was not misplaced, for the DC Personal Protection Act would pass comfortably by a vote of 250-171- a near inverse of its failure to

[10] The Hastert rule is an informal doctrine wherein the Speaker will not call a vote unless a majority supports that bill. As Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert explained "on each piece of legislation, I actively seek to bring our party together. I do not feel comfortable scheduling any controversial legislation unless I know we have the votes on our side first" (Sinclair 2006, 159).

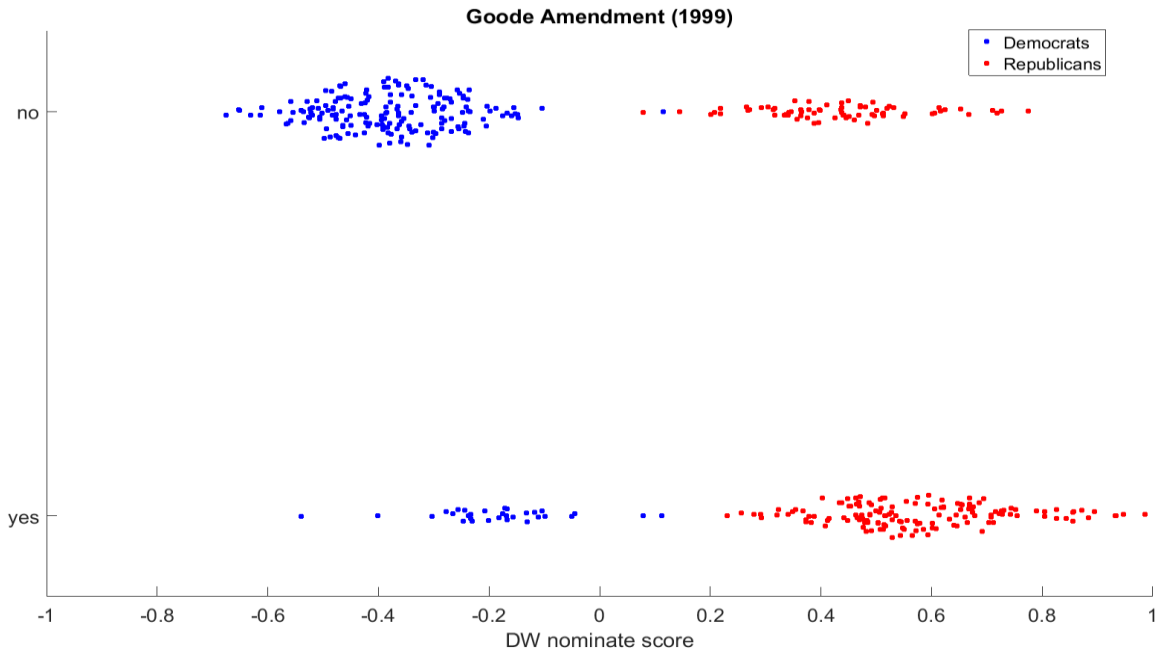
pass in 1999. Between 1999 and 2004, a pronounced shift in favor of repealing the handgun ban in Washington, D.C. occurred in the House. And critically, this shift was not solely the product of changes in the composition of Congress due to replacement (the process which Poole and Rosenthal (2007) cite as the explanation for changes in Congressional voting patterns over time (Poole and Rosenthal, 2007, 103)). It was also due to members shifting positions, with 16 Democrats and 34 Republicans switching their 1999 'no' votes to support the legislation in 2004. What explains this shift in favor of the ban repeal within both parties over this timeframe?

Table 1: D.C handgun ban repeal votes: 1999 & 2004

DC handgun ban repeal votes	Democrats	Republicans	Independents	Measure of polarization
1999 (failed 175-250)	30 yes (15%) 176 no (85%)	145 yes (66%) 73 no (34%)	1 no (100%)	.51
2004 (passed 250-171)	52 yes (26%) 148 no (74%)	198 yes (90%) 22 no (10%)	1 no (100%)	.64
2004 **(without vote switching)***	34 yes (17%) 166 no (83%)	163 yes (74%) 57 no (26 %)	-	.57

*This is how the 2004 vote would have looked if those who voted against the ban repeal in 1999 hadn't switched positions to support it in 2004.

Graph 6: Goode Amendment of 1999 (1st dimension DW-nominate)



Graph 7: DC Personal Protection Act of 2004 (1st dimension DW-nominate)

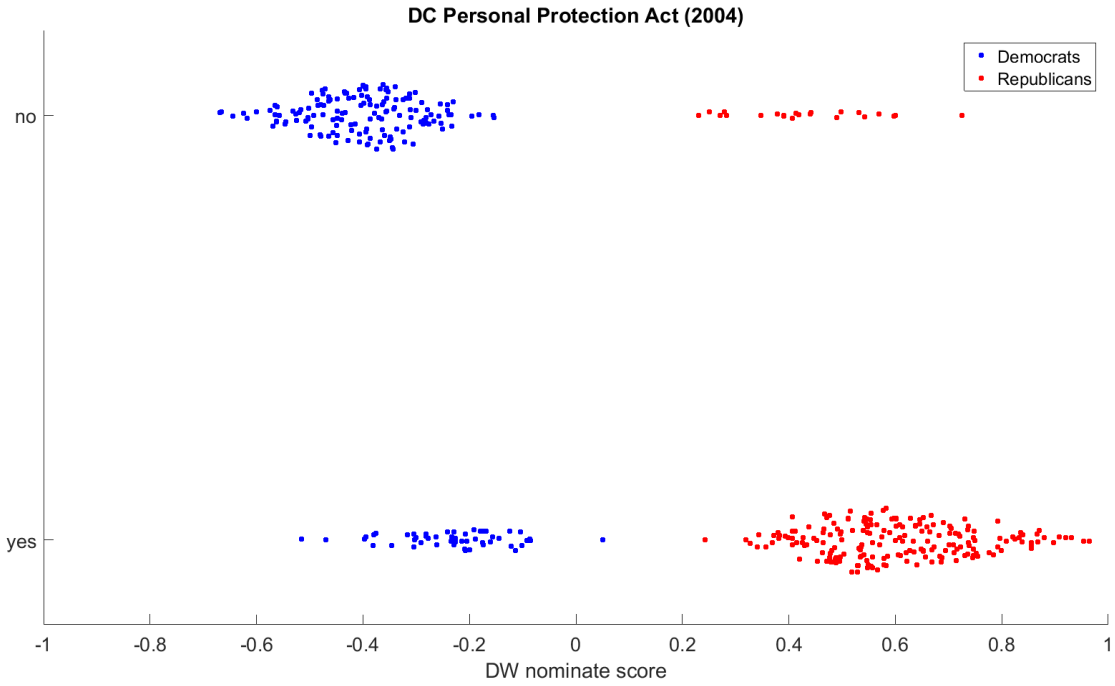


Table 2: A breakdown of Republican voting on Goode/DC Personal Protection Act

	Republicans voting for Goode (1999)	Republicans voting for DC (2004)
Moderate	21 of 60 (35%)*	43 of 57 (75%)
Conservative (most conservative half)	122 of 153 (80%) 67 of 78 (86%)	158 of 166 (95%) 88 of 89 (99%)
Median DW-nominate score	Republicans voting yes (.548) Republicans voting no (.436)	Republicans voting yes (.583) Republicans voting no (.413)

*percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 3: A breakdown of Democratic voting on Goode/DC Personal Protection Act

	Democrats voting for Goode (1999)	Democrats voting for DC (2004)
Liberal (most liberal half)	3 of 141 (2%) 2 of 80 (3%)	13 of 135 (10%) 2 of 79 (3%)
Moderate	28 of 68 (41%)	39 of 64 (61%)
Median DW-nominate score	Democrats voting yes (-.182) Democrats voting no (-.382)	Democrats voting yes (-.215) Democrats voting no (-.393)

The Republican shift

During the post Columbine juvenile crime/gun control debates of June 1999, 73 Republicans (34 percent of House Republicans) joined 176 Democrats (85 percent) in voting against the Goode Amendment to repeal Washington, D.C.'s handgun ban. This group was comprised not just of pro-controllers, but also included members who typically opposed gun controls. For with both crime and gun control remaining electorally salient issues, it was one thing to oppose gun controls or cast a vote for the weaker of two background check amendments; it was quite another to vote for a stand alone repeal of the handgun ban in the "murder capital of the United States" (as the District of Columbia, which consistently maintained the highest city homicide rate in the country, was often referred to) (106th Cong. Rec. H4635 (1999)). Yet five years later, much had changed. With the public preoccupied with terrorism, national security, and the economy, crime and gun control had been relegated to the political backburner. As the pressure to support gun control to be 'tough on crime' waned, it gave other electoral pressures and incentives more weight in influencing gun issue voting.

Primary challenges

For example, one electoral concern that began gaining relevance during this timeframe (and which has become increasingly significant over time, as Chapter Seven will demonstrate) was pressure to establish oneself as a "conservative in good standing" (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016, 114) in order to fend off potential primary challenges. Primary challenge threats were not a novel concern for Republicans; since the party's conservative identity began to coalesce during the Reagan presidency, individuals who deviated from party platform positions often weathered accusations that they were not "real Republicans" during primary campaigns (Freeman 1986, 350). And relating to the gun issue specifically, since the National Rifle Association shifted from a sports shooting to a political lobbying organization in the late 1970s, the group had come to involve itself in both primary and general election contests, endorsing the opponents of and campaigning against pro-control incumbents in Congress (Gray Davidson 1993). Yet despite these pressures, during the previous era there were numerous Republicans who voted for gun controls- some, like House representative Herbert Bateman (VA-1st) or Senator John Warner (VA) continuing to

do so even after being criticized for their pro-control position by a primary challenger.[11] For these individuals, losing a primary contest was not a big enough threat (particularly with their primary victories over anti-control opponents seemingly validating the electoral value of their positions) for them to abandon support for gun control during this decade.

Beginning in the early 2000s however, conservative groups such as the Club for Growth (founded in 1999) and FreedomWorks (founded in 2004) began to insert themselves into the Congressional nomination process, endorsing and funding primary challenges against Republican incumbents they deemed to be "insufficiently devoted to conservative principles" (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016, 111). As a result, Republicans in Congress who deviated from the party line began facing increasing pressure to conform to party standards to avoid being targeted for a primary challenge. And with gun control no longer an electorally salient issue for the general public, voting for gun rights legislation was an easy way to boost one's conservative credentials.

Additional incentives

Beyond primary challenge concerns, there were other incentives to voting the party line that gained increasing significance as the electoral relevance of gun control faded. As discussed in the literature review chapter, scholars have noted a tendency for members of Congress to default to party line voting in the absence of competing pressures, as there are numerous incentives that encourage it, such as the desire to forge bonds of political loyalty with fellow partisans, obtain desirable committee assignments, or work towards an eventual leadership role within the party (Olson 1966, Miller and Jennings 1986, Smith 2007, Lee 2009). Voting with their party is typically the ideal scenario for Congressional members, who, when there is not a conflict with their individual electoral incentives, are inclined to bring their issue positions in line with party doctrine (Levendusky 2009, Carsey and Layman 2010).

[11] In 1996, Bateman would defeat his anti-control challenger David Caprara, who criticized him in a newspaper interview for not supporting the Second amendment, 80 percent to 20 percent in the Republican primary for Virginia's 1st Congressional district (Lerman 1996). Senator Warner would also defeat his anti-control opponent James C. Miller (who was endorsed by the NRA, who campaigned for him and against Warner) in the Republican primary for the Virginia Senate that same year, 65 percent to 35 percent (Janofsky 1996).

Shifting in favor of gun rights

The decline in electoral significance of gun control coupled with the leadership's decision to begin agenda setting on gun rights led to a period of transition for Republican gun control moderates and pro-controllers. Overall, 34 Republicans in the House would change their votes on the DC handgun ban repeal from no to yes between 1999 and 2004. Some shifts were unsurprising, such as that of career anti-controllers[12] who had been unwilling to vote for the legislation during the crime concerned decade of the 1990s but were content to support gun rights given the right political circumstances. What was more notable were the shifting positions of pro-controllers, such as representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-18th) and Clay Shaw (FL-22nd).

Ros-Lehtinen and Shaw were both urban representatives in the state of Florida who had consistently supported gun control during the previous decade- each voting in favor of the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban during the 103rd Congress, as well as supporting the McCarthy background checks amendment and opposing the Goode amendment during the 106th Congress. As discussed in Chapter Three, throughout this decade urban representatives in particular faced significant electoral pressure to support gun control to be tough on crime, as their districts typically had higher violent crime rates than the national average (FBI UCR), while fear of crime and support for stricter gun controls was highest amongst urban residents (McAneny 1993, DeFrances and Smith 1994, Ferraro 1995). Yet by 2004, with public fear of crime and both the national violent crime rate and violent crime rates in many U.S cities having declined significantly since the early 1990s (including in the respective cities where Ros-Lehtinen and Shaw's urban districts were located[13]), this pressure on urban representatives had faded, creating room for other pressures and incentives to influence their voting on the gun issue.

Consider for example, the political circumstances of Ros-Lehtinen and Shaw as their party leadership began pursuing gun rights. Both were conservatives of the previous era who

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[12] All 23 of the remaining anti-controllers who had voted against the DC handgun ban repeal in 1999, including future Speakers of the House John Boehner (OH-8th) and Paul Ryan (WI-1st) switched positions to vote in favor of the legislation in 2004.

[13] In Fort Lauderdale, which comprised a large percentage of Clay Shaw's 22nd district, the violent crime rate had fallen from 1,465.4 per 100,000 in 1992 to 853.3 in 2004; in Miami, which comprised most of Ros-Lehtinen's 18th district, the violent crime rate had fallen from 3, 730.7 per 100,000 in 1992 to 1, 677.4 in 2004 (FBI: Uniform Crime Report Data Tool, 2016).

had over time been pushed into the moderate wing of the party by their newer, more conservative colleagues, despite their DW-nominate scores indicating that their roll call voting had also become more conservative over time.[14] With groups like The Club For Growth and FreedomWorks beginning to involve themselves in primary contests to attempt to oust moderate and "not conservative enough" Republicans, voting for gun rights legislation was a way to improve one's conservative credentials, and the electoral pressure to oppose gun rights that had once been significant for urban representatives was no longer a major concern. Notably, conservatives were the first opposition group Republicans to begin shifting in favor of gun rights, while conservative opposition to the DC handgun ban repeal would decrease from 20 percent in 1999 to just 5 percent in 2004 (refer to table 2 on page 158).

While they made no public statements in justification of their decisions to shift positions on the DC handgun ban repeal, both Ros-Lehtinen and Shaw would come to publicly abandon their support for gun control in later years and continue voting in favor of gun rights- a crucial indication that their reversal on the ban repeal was not a one off pre-election vote, but the beginning of a transition to a fixed anti-control/pro-gun rights position. During his brief campaign in 2009 for an open Senate seat in Florida, Shaw would initially defend his gun control record, telling a reporter "I don't back away from that vote (the Assault weapons ban) at all...Assault weapons are designed to kill people, it's as simple as that" (Hafenbrack 2009, 1). Yet two hours after the interview, Shaw would telephone the reporter to amend his statement and disavow federal gun controls, stating "I think the best thing to do is to leave it to the states... Gun owners should not be penalized where it's not a particular problem in that area. I don't think it ought to be a federal intrusion. I'd like to amend my answer if I could" (Gibson 2009, 2). With crime and gun control no longer electorally significant issues for the general public and with Democrats having abandoned the issue as a legislative priority (more on this to come in the following sections), there was little electoral incentive for Shaw to take a firm pro-control position during this campaign.

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen would also come to publicly abandon her former position, beginning to speak out after the gun control debate was revitalized in the aftermath of the

[14] Shaw's DW-nominate score increased from .312 to .369 between the 103rd and 108th Congresses, while Ros-Lehtinen's increased from .300 to .406 during this same timeframe (Voteview.com/DW-nominate).

Sandy Hook shooting in late 2012. A few days after the event, Ros-Lehtinen would state in a radio interview that gun control was not the solution to mass shootings, telling the host "this is a mental health problem, not weapons" and contending that "more laws are not going to stop these killings" (Ossowski 2012, 1). It was a clear shift in position from the previous era, when she had voted for the McCarthy background checks amendment in 1999 during debates which were held specifically in response to a mass shooting event- the Columbine high school shooting. And when Congressional Democrats began an effort to renew the Assault weapons ban in 2013, Ros-Lehtinen's spokesman Alex Cruz would tell a reporter that gun control advocates could not count on her vote for a ban, as "She used to support the ban, but she no longer does" (Blake 2013, 2). Ros-Lehtinen remained in the House through the 115th Congress (2017-2018), where she consistently voted for her party's gun rights agenda after shifting positions to vote for the DC handgun ban repeal in 2004.[15]

Democrats: Gun control no longer a winning issue

While the 2004 vote on the DC handgun ban repeal indicated a notable shift in the Republican party in favor of gun rights, Democratic support for the legislation also increased (albeit to a lesser degree than Republicans- an 11 percent increase compared to 24 percent) between 1999 and 2004. As the following sections will demonstrate, after over a decade of actively pursuing the enactment of gun controls, the Congressional Democratic leadership came to determine that gun control was no longer an electorally valuable issue for the party. And while despite this most Democrats would not vote in favor of gun rights legislation in the following years, the leadership's decision to distance the party from the issue and encourage members to vote their constituencies would lead gun control moderates and swing vote members to align with the Republican party in support of gun rights. As a result, the Democratic party's minority opposition group would grow during this decade as the Republican party's dissolved.

"You are why Al Gore isn't in the White House"

Even before the Republican party began shifting in support of gun rights, there had been a growing sense amongst Congressional Democrats that gun control was no longer an

[15] The exception being her 2017 vote against concealed carry reciprocity legislation (which she had supported in 2011). However, it is critical to note that this vote was held after Ros-Lehtinen announced she would not be seeking reelection in 2018.

electorally valuable, 'winning' issue for the party. Coinciding with the decline of crime as a priority political issue, the latest impetus for this belief[16] was the outcome of the 2000 presidential election, in which Democratic Vice President Al Gore was defeated by Texas Governor and Republican George W. Bush. As had occurred previously in the wake of the 1994 Republican Revolution, the National Rifle Association would publicly take credit for the election outcome. At the NRA's annual convention in April of 2002, then executive vice president Wayne Lapierre would be met with thunderous applause after telling the crowd "You are why Al Gore isn't in the White House," while NRA lobbyist James Jay Baker would publicly boast "No other group could have done what we did collectively in 2000" (*The Chicago Tribune*, 28 April 2002).

As discussed in Chapter Three, the notion that the NRA frequently plays a decisive role in shaping federal election outcomes is highly exaggerated; in terms of the 2000 presidential election, there is no convincing empirical evidence to support the organization's claims that the gun issue was pivotal in tipping the scales in favor of Bush. For example, while Gore did lose some formerly blue states (such as Arkansas, West Virginia, and his home state of Tennessee) considered to be 'pro-gun,'[17] the contention that Gore lost these states because of his pro-control stance presumes that this same stance did not win him any states he may otherwise have lost, such as the swing states of Pennsylvania and Michigan, where the NRA campaigned heavily against him (Moscoso 2002) and which Gore won largely based on his popularity amongst urban voters (Waldman 2012).

Additionally, assuming Gore lost Arkansas, West Virginia, and Tennessee predominantly due to his pro-control stance (which in itself was not particularly fervent)[18] ignores the evidence of continuing party realignment in the South. The 2000 presidential

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[16] Prior to 2000, the most recent claims that gun control had cost Democrats an election were floated by members of the Democratic leadership in 1994 in the wake of the Republican Revolution. In his 2004 autobiography, former President Bill Clinton would reaffirm this belief, writing, "The N.R.A. could rightly claim to have made Gingrich the House speaker" (Clinton 2004, 263).

[17] According to a 2002 study from the American Academy of Pediatrics, Arkansas was 5th, West Virginia 6th, and Tennessee 12th of the 50 states in a ranking of the states with the highest levels of gun ownership (Timmons 2015).

[18] Gore did not go out of his way to passionately assert his support for gun control during the 2000 campaign; when asked about gun control he would often downplay his position or even change the subject completely. *The New York Times* would report in September 2000 that Gore "has virtually stopped talking about gun control or the National Rifle Association" and quoted a source from the Violence Policy Center who referred to his campaign stance on the issue as 'ambivalent' (Dao 2000). Gore's pollster Stan Greenberg would later reveal that the campaign had studied an electoral map and determined that gun control was likely to hurt Gore in the swing states that were crucial for him to win (Scheiber 2001).

election and subsequent presidential contests would reflect a continuation of the party realignment trend discussed in the literature review (see page 30). The formerly Democratic states of the South that Gore lost had been trending less and less Democratic (and thus more and more Republican) in prior presidential elections, and would continue to do so in the following elections up to the most recent presidential contest in 2016- where all three of the aforementioned states were amongst the top ten strongest Republican states (‘Election Results for the U.S President.’ Federal Election Commission, 2016).

Table 4: Decline in support for Democratic presidential candidates in three states of the South*

Election year/Democratic presidential candidate	Tennessee	Arkansas	West Virginia
1992 (Clinton)	+4.5	+17	+15
1996 (Clinton)	+2.4	+17	+13
2000 (Gore)	-3.9	-5	-6
2004 (Kerry)	-14.3	-9	-13
2008 (Obama)	-15.1	-20	-13.2
2012 (Obama)	-20	-24	-27
2016 (Clinton)	-26	-27	-42

* The + or - indicates by how many percentage points the candidate won or lost that state
Source: ‘Election Results for the U.S President.’ Federal Election Commission.

Despite lacking in empirical evidence and academic support,[19] the theory that Gore’s gun control stance had cost him the presidency was nonetheless repeated ad nauseum by political pundits and news media journalists. For example, Jim V. Grimaldi of *The Washington Post* reported that “With the NRA’s vaunted political machine kicked into high gear and gun activists turning out in record numbers, vice president Al Gore lost West

[19] Numerous scholars have written about what they perceived to be the crucial factors that cost Gore the presidency. Hale (2002), Wattenberg (2003) and Johnston et al (2005) determined that Gore’s low favorability ratings and the moral failings of his predecessor (Clinton) overshadowed the economic successes of the Clinton administration in the minds of voters. Pomper (2001), Magee (2003), and Southwell (2004) concluded that the presence of third party candidate Ralph Nader almost certainly tipped the scales in Bush’s favor-these scholars determining that enough Nader votes would have gone to Gore to win him Florida and several other close states, even if a sizable portion of overall Nader voters decided not to vote. None of these academics concluded that the gun issue played a decisive or even a secondary role in the election; the gun issue was mentioned in passing in their studies, if at all.

Virginia, Arkansas and even his home state of Tennessee to Bush" (Grimaldi 2003, 3). Similarly, Charles Raasch of *USA Today* wrote "the Democrats lost West Virginia, Tennessee and Arkansas in the 2000 presidential election, in part because of fears they were assaulting the Second Amendment" (Raasch 2001, 1), while *Politico* columnist Roger Simon stated that "Guns made a big difference in 2000...especially in key states that Al Gore lost, like Tennessee and Arkansas" (Simon 2001, 1). Even Congressional Democrats were repeating the claim; for example, Gore's running mate, Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman, stated that gun control cost Democrats "a number of voters who on almost every other issue realized they'd be better off with Al Gore" (Koppelman 2007, 3). Similarly, House representative Max Sandlin (TX-1st) stated that if it weren't for the gun issue "there's absolutely no doubt that Vice President Gore would be president" (Hart 2011, 2), while one anonymous Senior Democratic Congressman told a reporter, "Of all the issues, gun control had the greatest negative effect" (Scheiber 2001, 3).

Many Democrats also appeared to believe that gun control had prevented the party from taking back majority control of both Houses during that same election cycle, one Democrat telling a reporter that many members believed the push for gun control hurt Democratic challengers in the House and Senate elections by "leaving them exposed to attacks by the National Rifle Association" (Eilperin 2000, 2). As with Gore's election defeat, there is no compelling empirical evidence to support the claim that the gun issue cost Democrats the House or Senate[20] during the 2000 elections. Yet in politics, the perceptions surrounding an issue are often more important in shaping Congressional behavior than the realities behind that issue. Thus whether or not the gun issue actually cost Gore the presidency or prevented Democrats from taking back the House and Senate mattered less than the widespread belief that it did. A month after the 2000 elections, House Minority leader Dick Gephardt (MO-3rd) held a series of meetings in order to address what Democrats viewed as a failure to engage with conservative, rural, white voters (Eilperin 2000). With talk of Gore's loss of key states being attributed to his gun control position (through his purported

[20] There is no compelling empirical evidence to indicate that the gun issue played a critical role in the Democratic party's failure to take control of the House. For example, in the House races in the three 'pro-gun' states that Gore lost (where one believing that Gore's gun control stance hurt Democrats may have expected to see Democratic incumbents swept out) all retained their seats by comfortable margins; overall, the vast majority of both rural and Southern Democratic incumbents (most of whom were anti-controllers) in the House kept their seats. In the Senate, Democrats would achieve a net gain of four Senate seats during this election cycle, defeating five NRA endorsed Republicans in the process.

alienation of these very same conservative, rural, white voters) the discussion predictably turned towards the gun issue. Pollster Mark Gersh gave a presentation at these meetings in which he told Democrats they had lost the election because culture war issues, and particularly gun control, had distracted voters (Koppelman 2007).

One unidentified source within the party told a reporter that after Gore's election loss, "A lot of people, McAuliffe (referring to former Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe), Daschle (South Dakota Senator), and Gephardt (former House Minority leader) were going around saying that guns had been the key...There was a lot of talk about how Democrats should avoid the issue entirely" (Koppelman 2007). Arkansas House representative Marion Berry would tell *The New York Times* "Dick Gephardt has said the leadership is not going to whip us on gun control anymore," while Massachusetts Rep. Barney Frank would express a similar sentiment, stating there would no longer be "a major push on this [issue]" (Moser 2012, 3). An eleven page "meat and potatoes strategy" memorandum written by Democratic strategists for the 2002 midterm elections did not feature the gun control issue, instead stating that "Democrats can win elections by focusing on domestic issues such as environmental protection, prescription drugs, middle-class tax cuts and securing the future of Social Security" (Moscoso 2002, 2). By 2005, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee chairman Rahm Emanuel was openly endorsing a "hands-off" policy in regard to the issue, stating that Democratic candidates "have got to reflect their districts" (Hart 2011, 2).

2004: Democratic support for gun rights increases

That Democratic leaders wanted to distance the party from the gun control issue did not mean that they were advocating for it to become a pro-gun rights party, and despite the decline in relevance of crime and the widespread belief that gun control had hurt the party electorally, most Democrats would not embrace the Republican gun rights agenda. But the Democratic leadership's decision to abandon gun control as a legislative priority meant that they would ease off on whipping Democrats to vote the party line. Thus for those wanting to boost their moderate credentials (in the same way that Republicans could use a vote for gun rights to bolster their conservative voting record) or who felt electorally vulnerable in the wake of the 2000 elections, there was more freedom (and even encouragement) to cross the party line than during the previous decade, when electoral pressure to support gun control to

be tough on crime was significant and gun control was a legislative priority for the leadership. As a result, support for the D.C. handgun ban repeal amongst House Democrats (and particularly moderates- see table 3 on page 158) would increase between 1999 and 2004, with 16 members switching votes to support the legislation, and 44 members signing on to co-sponsor the bill.

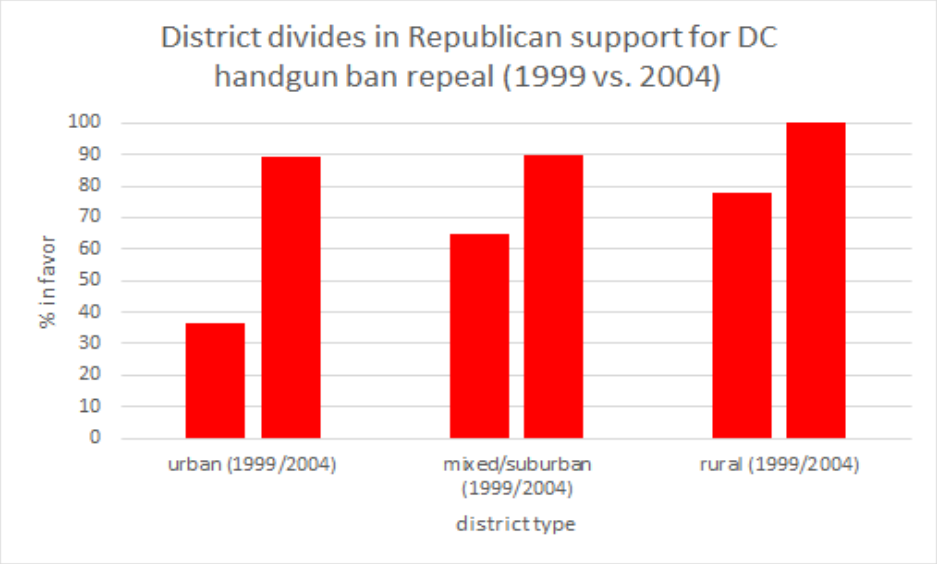
Of the Democrats who changed their votes from no to yes, half were either rural or Southern representatives, and a few were career anti-controllers who, like those in the Republican party, had not been willing to vote for the ban in 1999 but were not opposed to gun rights in the right political circumstances. Many of the shifters were gun control moderates, like representative Peter DeFazio (OR-4th), whose mixed suburban/rural district comprised the Southern coastal counties of Western Oregon. DeFazio had opposed the Assault weapons ban in 1994 but supported the Brady bill in 1993 and the McCarthy background checks amendment in 1999, while also opposing the Goode amendment that same year. DeFazio was emblematic of the type of politically moderate Democrat representing a mixed district that would come to embrace gun rights during this decade. While Oregon's 4th Congressional district has historically leaned Democratic, it was not a safe seat for the party (for example George W. Bush won the district in 2000 by slightly more than five percentage points (49.3 percent to 43.9 percent)(Federal Election Commission). And while DeFazio had enjoyed comfortable reelection victories since winning the seat in 1986, in the absence of pressure to support gun control and often facing vocally anti-control Republican challengers (such as his 2002 opponent, state representative Liz Van Leeuwen-a gun rights supporter who had once tried to pass a bill in the Oregon state House to require that every home own at least one firearm) (Smith 2002) voting for gun rights was a way to bolster his moderate reputation, particularly with the constituents in the rural parts of his district.

A shift in favor of gun rights: Conclusions

In summary, a comparative analysis of the two House votes to repeal the handgun ban in Washington, D.C. taken in 1999 and 2004 demonstrates that over this timeframe, a notable shift in favor of gun rights occurred in the House. This shift coincided with the fading electoral significance of the crime and gun control issues, which created room for other electoral pressures and incentives to influence Congressional voting on the gun issue.

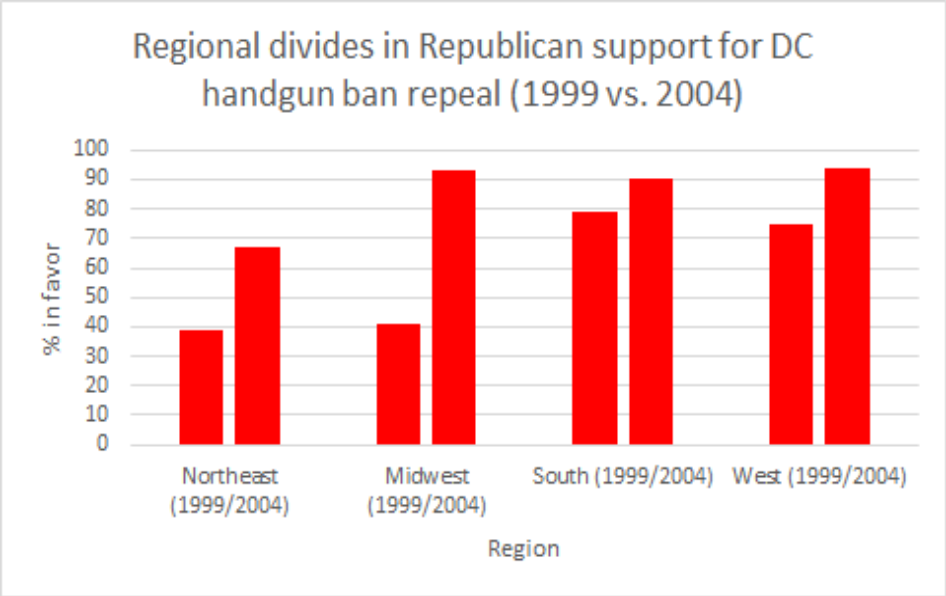
Overall, the shift was indicative of a period of transition for both parties. Republicans were beginning to unite-t he district type divides present in party voting on the ban repeal in 1999 had become practically insignificant by 2004, a compelling indication that the variables that previously divided Republicans (such as pressure on urban and suburban adjacent to urban Republicans to support gun control to combat crime) were losing relevance.

Graph 8: District type divides in Republican support for DC handgun ban repeal (1999 vs. 2004)



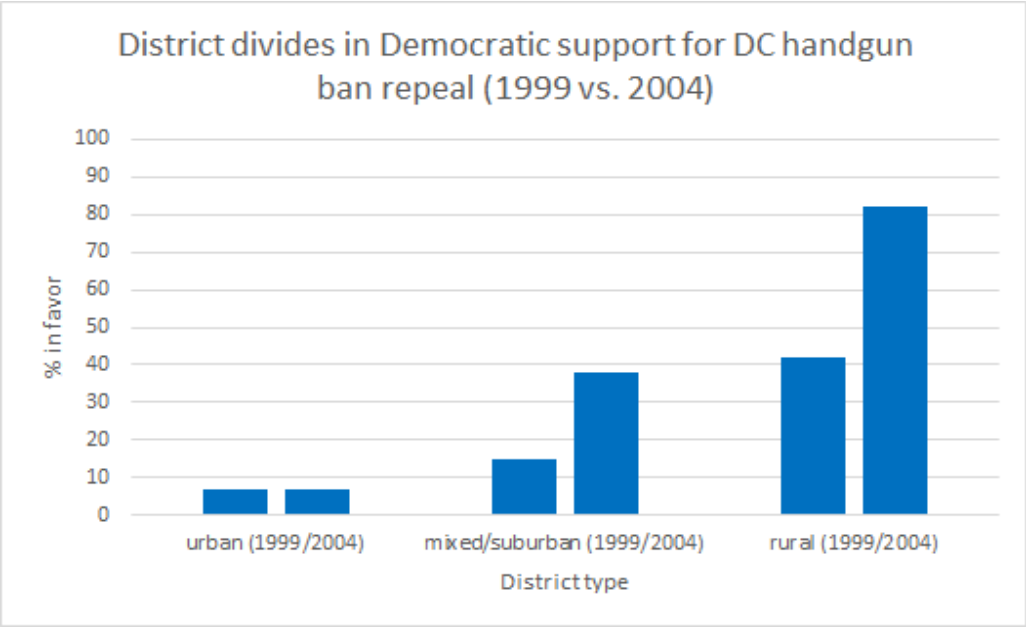
Additionally, by 2004 regional divides in voting were much less significant amongst Republicans. Although the greatest percentage of opposition continued to come from the Northeast (which contained most of the remaining members of the party's minority opposition group) when it came to the other three regions, Southern, Midwestern, and Western Republican support was roughly equal and overwhelmingly in favor of the ban repeal.

Graph 9: Regional divides in Republican voting for the DC handgun ban repeal (1999 vs. 2004)

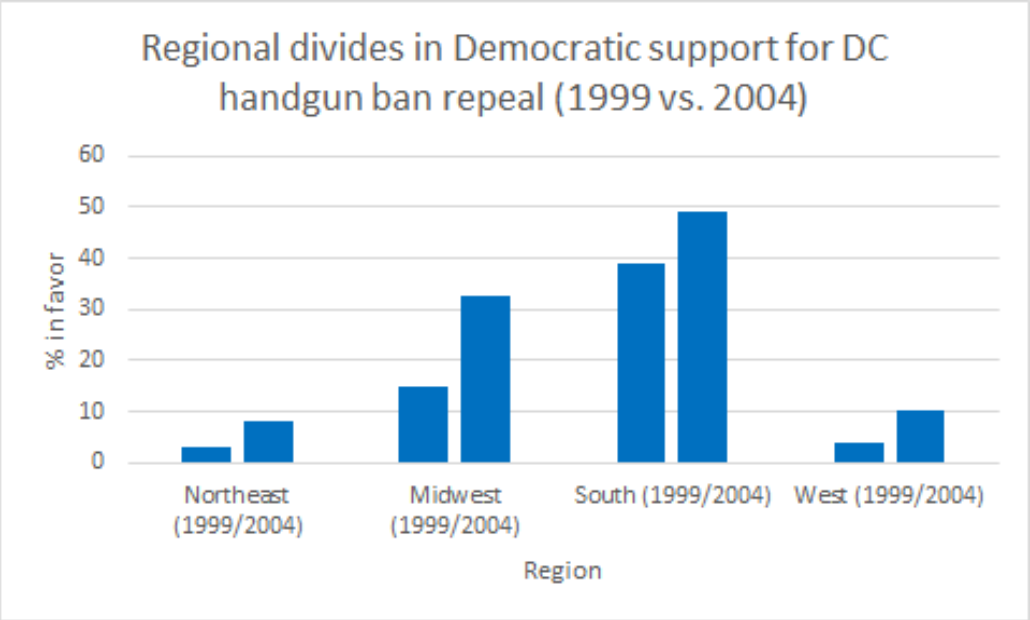


Meanwhile, Democrats remained divided along the typical district type and regional lines that they had been during the previous decade, with support for gun rights increasing, particularly amongst rural, Southern, and Midwestern (due to the large number of rural districts occupied by Democrats in this region at the time) representatives.

Graph 10: District divides in Democratic support for DC handgun ban repeal (1999 vs. 2004)



Graph 11: Regional divides in Democratic voting for the DC handgun ban repeal (1999 vs. 2004)



As a final point, in terms of polarization levels the vote on the DC Personal Protection Act was more partisan polarized than the Goode amendment (see table on page 157), despite Democratic support for gun rights also increasing- a clear indication that the Republican shift was primarily responsible for driving increasing partisan polarization between bills. Overall, while the DC Personal Protection Act passed comfortably and with bipartisan support in the House during the waning months of the 108th Congress, that Congress would come to an end before similar legislation could be considered in the Senate. Some would accuse the Republican House leadership of timing the vote to flex their political muscle and put electorally vulnerable Democrats on the spot during election season (Stern 2004, Hsu 2004). Yet whatever the leadership's motivation behind the timing of the bill, as the rest of the thesis will demonstrate, this gun rights vote was not simply a one time pre-election ploy, nor was the Congressional shift in favor of gun rights that had occurred between 1999 and 2004 a fluke.

Part IV: The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act

With the shift in favor of repealing the handgun ban in Washington, D.C. having boded well for the viability of a gun rights pursuit in Congress, the Republican party would achieve a landmark gun rights legislative victory during the following (109th of 2005-2006) Congress. The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (which was commonly referred to as the 'gun liability bill') would shield manufacturers, distributors, dealers, and importers of firearms and ammunition from civil liability for injuries resulting from misuse of their products by others unless their actions were found to be criminally negligent[21] (Schuler 2005). In basic terms, the legislation would prevent most victims of gun violence from seeking damages from gun manufacturers in civil court. For several decades, lawsuits had periodically been filed against gun manufacturers under the tort law principle that business entities can be held responsible for selling products that expose the public to risk of harm; litigants in these lawsuits contended that gun manufacturers were aware that a disproportionate number of their firearms ended up in the hands of criminals (Spitzer 2012, 157). Such lawsuits were unsuccessful until 1999, when in the landmark case *Hamilton v. Accu-Tek,* a Brooklyn jury awarded damages to the families of victims of gun violence on the aforementioned grounds. While the verdict was later overturned on appeal, it inspired a succession of similar lawsuits across the country, with nearly 30 cities bringing their own suits against gun manufacturers with the help of pro-control groups like the Brady Campaign, in what they argued was an effort to combat the financial cost of urban gun violence (Spitzer 2012, 157).

In 2002, a high profile lawsuit was brought against the gun manufacturer Bushmaster of Maine and the gun store Bull's Eye Shooter Supply of Tacoma, Washington. Earlier that year, John Allen Muhammad and Lee Boyd Malvo had killed 10 people and injured three during the course of a three week sniper attack in Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, D.C.; it was later revealed that Malvo had stolen the semi-automatic assault rifle he used in the shootings from Bull's Eye Shooter Supply, which failed to notice or report that that particular firearm and over 230 others (50 of which turned up in various crime traces) had gone missing from their inventory over a three year period (Murphy, Gonzalez, and Gettleman 2002).

[21] Lawsuits could still be brought against manufacturers or dealers who broke the law, such as those selling firearms with the knowledge they would be used to commit violent crimes or would be involved in drug trafficking. Lawsuits could also still be brought in cases where proper use resulted in physical injury, death or property damage due to a defect in the firearm (Sandler and Stern 2005, Schuler 2005).

Several family members of the victims of the D.C. snipers filed a civil lawsuit against the gun shop on the grounds that it negligently failed to keep track of its weapons inventory, and against the manufacturer Bushmaster for continuing to supply firearms to a store which behaved in a negligent manner. Both ultimately settled- Bull's Eye paying out $2 million, and Bushmaster $550,000, to the plaintiffs (Spitzer 2012, 157).

Civil liability protection and gun rights

What did shielding gun manufacturers from civil liability lawsuits have to do with protecting gun rights? In the words of Senate Majority leader Bill Frist "If the gun industry is forced into bankruptcy, the 'right to keep and bear arms,' will be a right in name only" (109th Cong. Rec. S8913 (2005)). In other words, gun rights supporters contended that gun control advocates, unable to get their legislative agenda passed by Congress, were using the Courts to "impose gun control by judicial means" (109th Cong. Rec. H2965 (2005)) with the ultimate goal of bankrupting the firearms industry and curbing gun access to the public. This purported attempt to use liability suits to make it difficult for law-abiding citizens to obtain firearms was viewed as a violation of Second Amendment rights, which could be remedied by passing legislation to "preserve a citizen's access to a supply of firearms and ammunition for all lawful purposes, including hunting, self-defense, collecting, and competitive or recreational shooting" (S. 397, 109th Cong., 1st Sess. (2005)).

Did such lawsuits truly pose a threat of bankrupting the firearms industry? On one hand, their potential to inflict financial damage could not be ignored, and a continuous stream of lawsuits had been filed which was unlikely to cease. Yet on the other, most of the lawsuits filed had been dismissed, including high profile suits in Miami and Chicago- the latter seeking $433 million in damages (Lighty 1999). It appeared that the court system was functioning properly and assessing the merits of these lawsuits objectively. And while gun shops like Bull's Eye would be hurt if multiple lawsuits were won or settlements paid out, overall the firearm manufacturers industry was a multi-billion dollar one. With Bushmaster being bought by the private equity firm Cerberus Capital management for $70 million in 2006 (a firm collectively worth $50 billion in 2018)(Balentine 2006, Dhanjal 2018), the $550,000 paid out to the DC sniper victim plaintiffs was unlikely to have put Bushmaster in dire financial straits. Ultimately, while such lawsuits posed a valid concern for gun manufacturers financially, based on their limited success and the deep pockets of gun manufacturers (and the conglomerate companies that owned them), the threat of the

impending bankruptcy of the industry and curbed public access to firearms was an exaggerated one. Yet beyond mitigating this threat, the legislation also had major symbolic and practical significance for gun rights- legitimizing this right in legal terms by granting civil liability protection solely to the gun manufacturing industry, while in doing so specifically barring gun control advocates from being able to use the courts as a means of holding gun manufacturers accountable for their role in gun violence.

Gun rights or civil law?

During floor debate, many chose to frame their arguments for or against the legislation in terms of the proper scope of civil liability law.[22] For example, co-sponsor of the legislation Larry Craig (R:ID) told the Senate that "the manufacturers or sellers of a legal, non-defective product should not be held liable for the criminal or unlawful misuse of that product by others" (109th Cong. Rec. S1906 (2005)). On the opposite side, Sheila Jackson-Lee (D:TX-18th) argued that such law existed to incentivize responsible manufacturing and selling procedures and to protect consumers, and that the legislation being considered was "a drastic departure from established principles of liability law, which generally hold that persons and companies may be held liable for the foreseeable consequences of their negligent or wrongful acts, including the foreseeable criminal conduct of others" (109th Cong. Rec. H2975 (2005)). Yet while questions about the scope of civil liability law were a critical component, the debate was fundamentally about gun rights.

First, the Republican leadership and those tasked with drafting the legislation (Senator Larry Craig (ID) and representative Cliff Stearns (FL-6th)) made a point to emphasize the importance of gun rights in the text of the legislation. Under the 'Findings' section of the bill, the first statement read "The Second Amendment to the United States Constitution provides that the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed" while the second statement followed with "The Second Amendment to the United States Constitution protects the rights of individuals, including those who are not members of a militia or engaged in military service or training, to keep and bear arms" (Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms

[22] It is worth noting that there was little to no discussion of crime during the floor debates- no mention of crime rates, public concerns about crime, or discussion of the utility of the lawsuits as a way to (by holding gun manufacturers accountable) mitigate the cost of urban gun violence-which was the stated purpose behind most of the lawsuits brought by cities against gun manufacturers in the late 1990s. That the majority of those opposed chose to frame their arguments in legal terms instead of focusing on the urban crime angle was indicative of the decline of crime as a priority political issue.

Act of 2005, S.397, 109th Cong., 1st Sess. (2005)). The bill would be the first piece of federal legislation that contained within it a provision qualifying the existence of an individual right to bear arms. Three years before the *District of Columbia v. Heller (*2008*)* Supreme Court decision would legally legitimize the concept of an individual right to bear arms, the Republican party was symbolically affirming it themselves; with the Second amendment written into the text of the bill, it is impossible to extricate the gun rights issue from the civil liability question in this debate.

Additionally, if the bill was fundamentally about protecting the manufacturers or sellers of legal, non-defective products from being held liable for "the criminal or unlawful misuse of that product by others" (109th Cong. Rec. S1906 (2005)) as Senator Larry Craig contended, why did the bill only grant this civil liability protection to gun manufacturers? In doing so, it specifically barred the access of one group of citizens (victims of gun violence-often guided through the process by gun control advocates) to the court system, granting one industry protection from the type of lawsuits available to individuals seeking recourse across industries. Barring gun control advocates from using the courts appeared to be one of the primary goals of supporters of the legislation like Senate Majority leader Bill Frist, who expressed that it was a necessity to circumvent "Anti-gun crusaders who believe that it's okay to use lawsuits to circumvent the democratic process and legislate from the bench" (109th Cong. Rec. H1906 (2005)).

Gun liability and interest groups

As a final point, the role played by gun issue interest groups leaves little doubt about the primary focus of the debate. It was no secret that the Republican leadership and the NRA were allies in pursuit of the bill's passage, while gun control supporters in Congress and the Brady campaign were allies in opposition to it. The gun liability bill was a top legislative priority for the NRA, who since the late 1990s had been working with pro-gun rights legislators at the state level to pass legislation banning such lawsuits (by 2005 33 states had enacted some form of the legislation)(Stolberg 2005). For their part, the Brady campaign had brought 50 of the 57 gun related federal lawsuits pending at the time of the gun liability vote; Brady Campaign director Dennis Henigan publicly vowed to challenge the constitutionality of the bill if it passed (Murray 2005). Overall, there existed a clear divide between gun rights advocates and the NRA, who viewed these lawsuits as "a flagrant abuse of the judicial system, designed to advance a stalled anti-gun legislative agenda" (NRA-ILA, 8 April 2004)

and gun control advocates and the Brady campaign, who stated that the gun liability bill would "remove the best deterrent against irresponsible acts by dealers and manufacturers- the threat of a huge judgment" (Murray 2005, 1). That these gun issue interest groups were heavily involved in and on opposing sides of the debate provides compelling evidence that despite its entanglement with questions about the proper scope of civil liability law, the gun control versus gun rights divide lie at the heart of the gun liability bill debate.

Decisive agenda setting

As had been the case with the DC Personal Protection Act (and as was typical of the leadership's procedural style at the time) Republican party leaders made assertive moves to facilitate the passage of the gun liability bill. In a move that angered many Democrats (who accused him of putting the interests of the Republican leadership and gunmakers ahead of national security) Senate Majority leader Bill Frist set aside the $491 billion defense spending authorization bill that the Senate had at that point been considering and called up the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act for consideration on the Senate floor. Taking steps to ensure complete control over the agenda and debate, Frist successfully filed motions to invoke cloture (a procedure requiring three-fifths chamber approval to limit debate) and bar non-germane amendments to the bill,[23] while also filing a succession of his own amendments to be voted on (a practice referred to as filling an amendment tree) (Sinclair 2006). In doing the latter, Frist took advantage of the Senate Majority leader's prerogative to decide the sequence in which amendments would be considered, maintaining tight control of the floor debate and making it incredibly difficult for opponents to propose weakening amendments to the bill.

Like Majority leader Frist had done in the Senate, House leaders worked to maintain tight control over both the legislation itself and the floor debate. Speaker Dennis Hastert and new House Majority leader Roy Blunt (MO-7th) (the former Majority Whip who took over from Tom DeLay after he was forced to take a leave of absence three weeks before the actual vote)[24] decided to set aside their version of the bill and vote on the Senate bill instead,

[23] A non-germane amendment is an amendment that would "add new and different subject matter to, or may be irrelevant to, the bill or other measure it seeks to amend" ('Non-germane amendment,' Senate.gov).
[24] DeLay had stepped down from his position as House Majority leader on September 29th after being indicted on charges of criminal conspiracy for violating election law after being accused of steering corporate donations to Republican candidates in the Texas legislature in 2002 (Stolberg 2005).

eliminating the need for a Conference Committee to iron out the differences between bills and thus ensuring its swift passage into law. As they had done with the DC Personal Protection Act vote the year prior, the House Rules Committee would invoke a closed rule for floor debate, barring any amendments from being considered (Stern 2005).

The roll call votes

The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act would comfortably pass in both chambers of Congress and be signed into law by President George W. Bush on October 26, 2005. The Republican party's increasing unity in favor of gun rights was even more pronounced here, as only six Republicans (two in the Senate and four in the House) would oppose their party's gun liability legislation. Meanwhile, the Democratic party (its leaders by that point having abandoned gun control as a legislative priority) remained divided over the gun issue, with certain members (in particular Southern and rural representatives) crossing party lines to vote for the Republican gun rights bill.

Table 5: The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (2005)

Vote	Democrats (House/Senate)	Republicans (House/Senate)	Independents (House/Senate)	Measure of polarization
Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (2005) H: Passed 283-144 S: Passed 65-31	H: 59 yes (30%) 140 no (70%) **S:** 14 yes (33%) 29 no (67%)	H**:** 223 yes (98%) 4 no (2%) **S:** 50 yes (96%) 2 no (4%)	H: 1 yes (100%) S: 1 yes (100%)	H**:** .68 **S:** .63

Graph 12: The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (1st dimension DW-nominate)

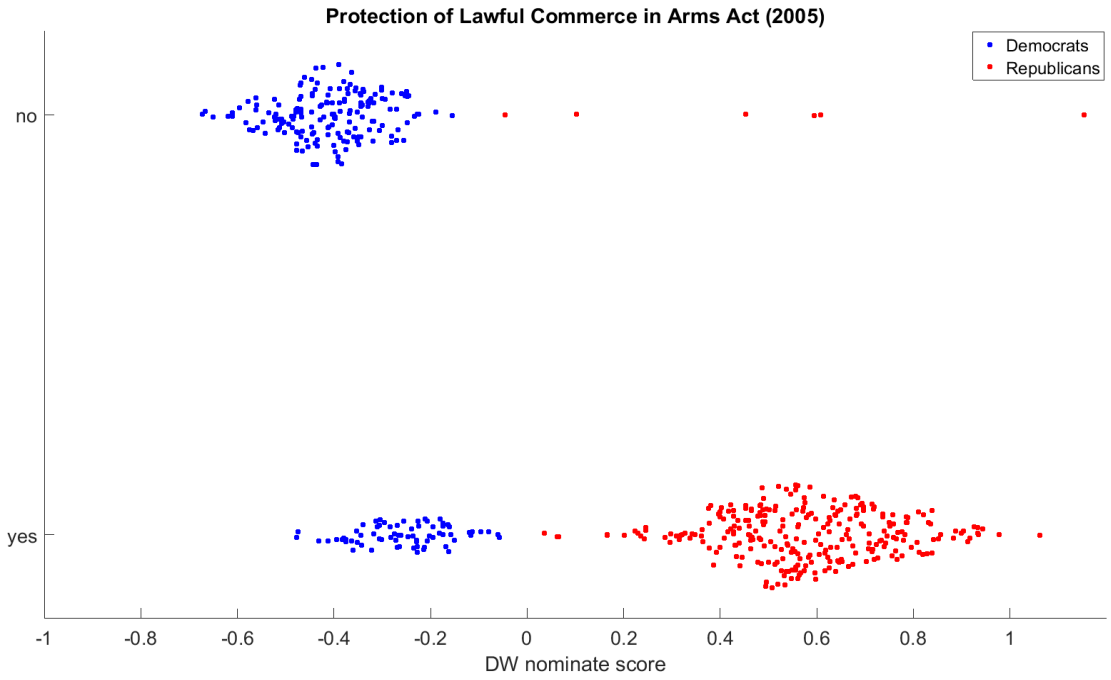


Table 6: A breakdown of party voting on Protection of Lawful Commerce

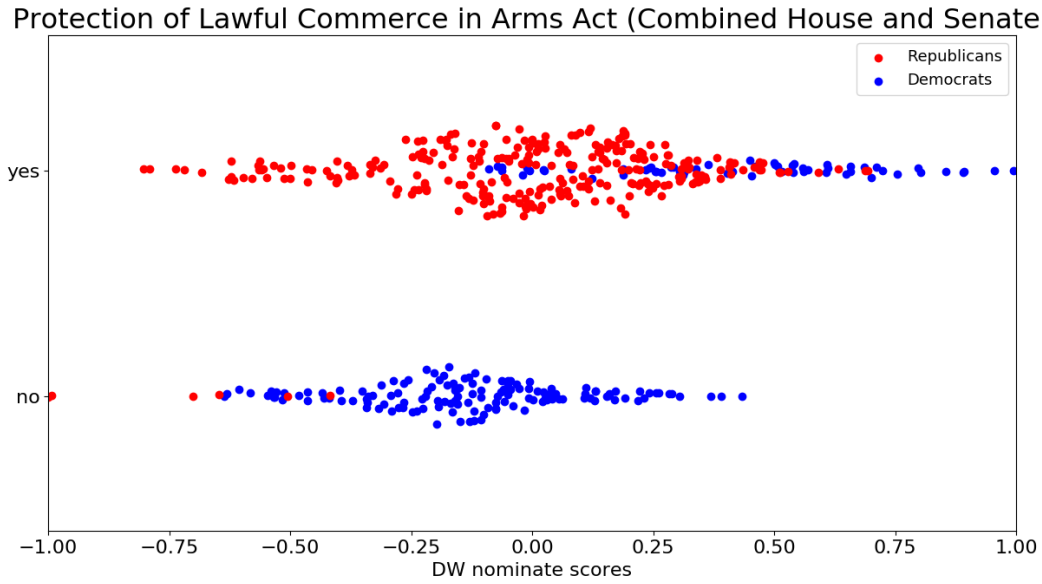
	Republicans voting in favor		Democrats voting in favor
Moderate	103 of 106 (97%)*	Liberal (most liberal half)	21 of 178 (12%) 2 of 89 (2%)
Conservative (most conservative half)	175 of 178 (98%) 88 of 89 (99%)	Moderate	45 of 70 (64%)
Median DW-nominate score	Republicans voting yes (.562) Republicans voting no (.523)		Democrats voting yes (-.247) Democrats voting no (-.404)

*percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

As is clear from both the DW-nominate graph and the more complete breakdown in the chart above, the vast majority of Congressional Republicans voted for the gun liability bill irrespective of where they fell on the ideological spectrum of the 109th Congress. For

Democrats, while most liberals opposed the legislation, more than half of those falling within the second (moderate) tercile of this Congress voted with Republicans.

Graph 13: The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (2nd dimension DW-nominate)

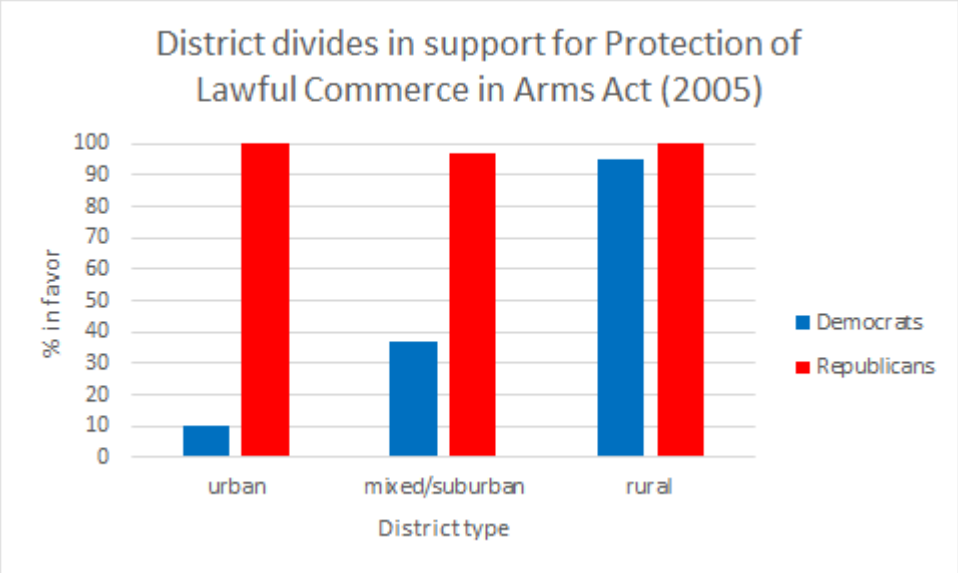


That region remained one of the primary sources of division within the Democratic party on the gun issue is particularly evident through the second dimension of DW-nominate, which picks up divisions within parties along racial or regional lines (Poole and Rosenthal, 2007, 42). Most of the Democratic supporters of the bill had scores on the higher end of this dimension (a score closer to 1 indicating stronger regional considerations/influence in voting). For Republicans, while the few opponents of the bill had scores on the low end, many with similar second dimension scores nonetheless supported the gun liability bill- continued evidence (as with the second dimension analysis of the Brady bill and the Assault Weapons ban votes on page 99) that this dimension is less useful for picking up inter-party divides within the Republican party. This lack of second dimension utility for Republicans is intelligible given that crime concerns and not region had been the key cross cutting factor in Republican party support for gun control.

In the House: District type divides

In the House, the divides between urban, mixed/suburban, and rural representatives on the gun issue that had once been present in both parties now only remained for Democrats. Most Republicans voted for the gun liability bill regardless of what type of district they represented.

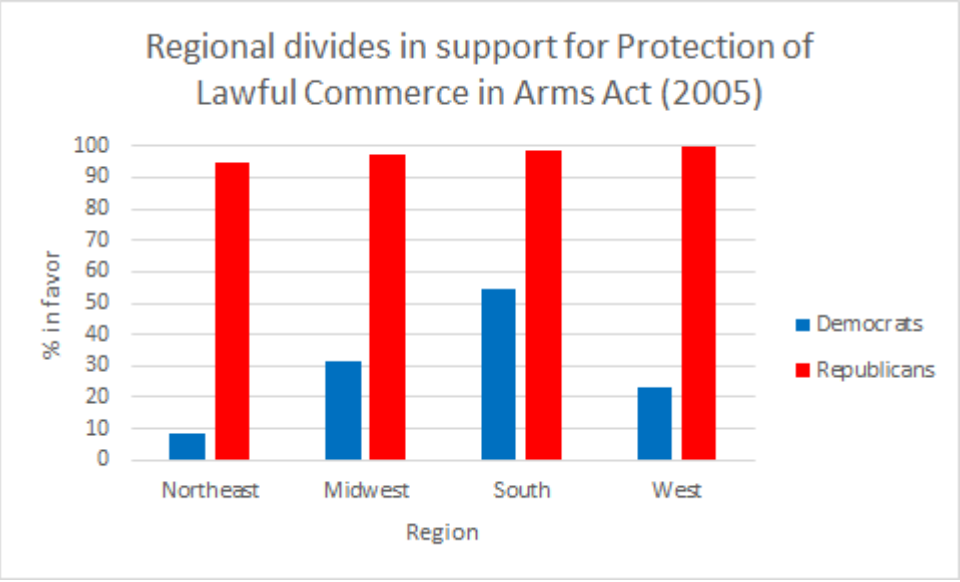
Graph 14: District type divides in support for the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act



Regional divides

Similarly, while the typical regional divides that had historically been present in gun issue voting remained for Democrats (the importance of such divides for Democratic voting corroborated by the 2nd dimension of DW-nominate discussed above), there were no significant regional divides in support amongst Republicans.

Graph 15: Regional divides in support for the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act



The Republican shift: The dissolution of the pro-control minority opposition group

Overall, what remained of the Republican party's pro-control contingent by the gun liability bill votes (with 16 pro-controllers having left Congress due to retirement or reelection loss since the post Columbine gun control debates of 1999) were five Senators and 31 House members, the latter of whom were primarily mixed district and suburban representatives. As the previous graphs illustrate, most of this group (and all but six Republicans in Congress) voted for the gun liability bill in 2005. With the shift in favor of the D.C. handgun ban repeal between 1999 and 2004 and this vote, it was becoming increasingly evident that the Republican party was unifying in favor of gun rights. Ultimately, the dissolution of the party's pro-control minority opposition group that occurred during this timeframe marked a critical turning point in the shift towards hyper partisan polarization on gun control in Congress. As Chapter Seven will demonstrate, the dissolution of this group in the mid-2000s was not temporary, as the Republican party remains similarly united on the gun issue today- with no comparable such group[25] having reemerged, despite the revitalization of the gun control debate by Democrats in late 2012.

[25] As detailed in the 'key terms' section of the Introduction on page 10, a minority opposition group in this thesis must comprise a minimum of 15 percent of the party in the House and 10 percent in the Senate.

Gaining electoral significance: Primary challenge threats

In a preview of what was to become a political reality for many Republicans in the following decades (as will be seen in Chapter Seven), some opposition group members were beginning to face heightened pressure to support gun rights to fend off primary challenges. One such individual was Wayne Gilchrest (MD-1st), a political moderate representing a suburban district that contained a large swath of Baltimore county. Gilchrest, whose district was on the outskirts of one of the nation's most high crime cities throughout the 1990s,[26] had been a vocal gun control supporter throughout that decade. And while he had easily defeated a group of primary challengers in 1994 and 1996 and faced no challenges in 1998 and 2000, from 2002 onwards Gilchrest began to face more intense and competitive primary challenges from conservative opponents ('Primary Election Returns,' Maryland.gov) who criticized his moderate voting record, including his support for gun control.

In 2002 both the conservative group Club for Growth and the NRA had endorsed and financially contributed to the campaign of Gilchrest's primary opponent, attorney David Fischer, who ran on a platform of "conservative values like increased gun rights" (Townsend 2002, 1) and who painted Gilchrest as a gun hating liberal. While he successfully fended off this challenge, in 2004 he faced another from state senator Richard Colburn, who called himself a "conservative for Congress" and attacked his opponents voting record on issues such as abortion, taxes, gay marriage, and gun control (Hern 2003). Gilchrest attempted to deflect from his pro-control voting record by arguing that it was no longer a top concern for voters, shifting the conversation towards the issues he deemed most important for the upcoming election, which included stabilizing Iraq and fixing the budget deficit (DeGregario 2004). Yet that he had begun to feel that his gun control record made him electorally vulnerable was evident when he joined the NRA for the first time in the spring of 2002; prior to the 2002 primary he would run television commercials in his district calling himself a "Marine hero, and longtime NRA member who understands the need to protect our Second Amendment rights" (Seelye 2002, 2).

[26] With a violent crime rate of 2,994 per 100,000 in 1993, Baltimore had the second highest urban violent crime rate in the country, surpassed only by Atlanta, Georgia (which had a rate of 4,041.2 (FBI UCR tool 2017).

With crime rates in Baltimore having significantly declined[27] and with his Democratic general election opponents avoiding the gun control issue, there had come to be little electoral incentive for Gilchrest to oppose his party's gun rights agenda, particularly as he began facing an onslaught of primary challengers who criticized his pro-control record. And while Gilchrest would vote for the gun liability bill in 2005 and for two more gun rights bills in the House in the following years, it would not be enough to save his Congressional career, as he would eventually succumb to a primary challenge defeat in 2008[28]- outcomes like his validating the growing electoral threat of primary challenges against moderate or "not conservative enough" Republicans.

A period of transition

While it is evident that Wayne Gilchrest was facing pressure to vote for gun rights to fend off primary challengers, taken as a whole, the dissolution of the Republican pro-control faction during this timeframe can best be understood in terms of a period of transition. Most of these individuals would shift in favor of gun rights not because they faced immediate and direct pressure to do so, but rather because the pressure they once faced to support gun control had waned, giving other factors more weight in influencing their voting on the gun issue. For example, as discussed previously, there are numerous political and electoral incentives to voting the party line (see page 160) if doing so does not conflict with a member's individual electoral incentives. Additionally, even if most had not experienced having their pro-control voting record used against them in a primary as Gilchrest had, the potential threat of a primary challenge was becoming increasingly significant, as conservative groups like Club for Growth and FreedomWorks began involving themselves in the primary process. Voting for gun rights was a way to boost ones conservative credentials, while such a vote was unlikely to be criticized by a Democratic opponent in the general election, as by this point Democratic incumbents and those running for competitive seats had been advised by their party committees to avoid the gun issue during campaigns (Thrush 2016). Overall, that most of the party's remaining gun control supporters began shifting in favor of gun rights

[27] The violent crime rate in Baltimore in 1993 was 2,994 per 100,000; by 2005 it had declined to 1,754.5 per 100,000 (FBI UCR tool 2017).

[28] Gilchrest would lose the Republican primary in 2008, when he was defeated by State Senator and Club for Growth endorsed candidate Andrew Harris 43 percent to 33 percent ('Primary Election Returns,' Maryland.gov).

during this timeframe strongly suggests that old electoral pressures and incentives influencing voting on the gun issue were being replaced by new ones.

Shifting in favor of gun rights: Examples

Both chambers would see veteran Republican pro-controllers shifting in favor of gun rights during this decade, the first step for many being a vote for the gun liability bill. In the Senate, one such individual was Richard Lugar of Indiana. Prior to winning his seat in 1976, Lugar had served for nine years as the first Republican mayor of the city of Indianapolis; having dealt with rising crime in the city during his tenure,[29] it was a career he later credited with shaping his support for gun control (Walsh 1999). He would establish himself as a consistent pro-controller throughout the 1990s, voting for the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban during the 103rd Congress, as well as for the Lautenberg background checks amendment during the 106th. That during that decade Lugar had viewed his pro-control position as electorally valuable was evident during his 1996 run for the Republican presidential nomination. During this campaign, he had run a television advertisement touting his support for the Assault weapons ban, stating, "There is no right to sweep a playground with an assault weapon. I parted company with Senators Graham and Dole (who were also running for the presidential nomination), I did what I thought was right...Being a conservative doesn't mean you have to lose your common sense" ("Dick Lugar for President" Campaign ad, 1996, Youtube.com). Additionally, Lugar had consistently earned an 'F' rating from the National Rifle Association in their yearly 'Candidate positions on gun rights,' while his pro-control voting record had led NRA Institute for Legislative Action chairman Chris Cox to refer to him as a "notorious gun control zealot" (NRA-PVF 2012).

Yet for Lugar, as for many other Republican pro-controllers during this timeframe, as the crime and gun control issues lost their electoral relevance, other pressures and incentives were becoming increasingly significant. For example, while he had identified as a conservative throughout his political career, by 2005 Lugar was one of the more moderate leaning (at least by party standards) Republicans in the Senate;[30] with well funded

[29] The violent crime rate in Indianapolis increased from 162.9 per 100,000 in 1967 (his first year as mayor) to 315.4 when he left in 1976 for the Senate; it would increase to 525.1 by 1994 during the timeframe when crime rates were peaking nationally (FBI: UCR tool 2017).

[30] Of the 52 Republicans in the Senate at that time, only 11 had lower DW-nominate scores than Lugar's score of .245.

conservative groups now entering the political arena with the aim of ousting "not conservative enough" Republicans, the threat of a primary challenge loomed (and it was one that would ultimately come to fruition in 2012, when Lugar lost the Republican primary to a Tea Party challenger[31]). Facing reelection in 2006, by this point there was greater electoral incentive for him to support the gun liability bill (and boost his conservative credentials by voting for gun rights) than oppose it (and continue to maintain a pro-control position on an issue that no longer galvanized voters, as was particularly clear after the 2004 elections[32]). Ultimately, Lugar would deviate from his pro-control record, voting for the gun liability bill and three additional gun rights bills before losing his seat in 2012 (see chart on page 192). Once a vocal gun control supporter, he would become tight lipped on the issue- when asked about a potential bipartisan effort to renew the ban on assault weapons in 2011, he would simply state, "the fact is that the politics domestically in our country with regard to this are on a different track" ("Richard Lugar on Assault Weapons ban" The Huffington Post, 25 May 2011).

Another Republican pro-control Senator to shift in favor of gun rights was George Voinovich of Ohio. Voinovich had come to the Senate in 1999 after seven years as Governor of that state, where during his tenure he had often broken ranks with his party over the gun issue, once threatening to veto concealed carry legislation being considered at the state level (Walsh 1999). Prior to that (and from a similar background as his colleague Richard Lugar), he had established himself as a gun control supporter during his near decade as Mayor of the city of Cleveland, during a period when the violent crime rate in the city had steadily increased.[33] During his first year in the Senate 1999, Voinovich voted for the Lautenberg background checks amendment during the post Columbine debates; it would earn him an 'F' rating from the NRA in 2000 and be used against him in later years by NRA representative Kelly Hobbs, who publicly called him "out of touch with Ohioans" (NRA-PVF 2006). Like Lugar, Voinovich was a moderate leaning Republican trying to survive in a party that had grown increasingly conservative over time, with little electoral incentive to maintain his gun

[31] Lugar would lose the Indiana Republican primary in 2012 to Tea Party challenger Richard Mourdock, who won 60 percent of the vote (Kabaservice 2012).
[32] That they had allowed the Assault weapons ban to expire did not appear to hurt the Republican party in the 2004 elections, as the party picked up three House seats (maintaining a 31 seat advantage) and four Senate seats (maintaining a 10 seat advantage), while president Bush also won a second term in office.
[33] While no data is available prior to 1985 (Voinovich became mayor in 1980), the violent crime rate in Cleveland steadily increased over the following decade, increasing from 1,204.9 per 100,000 in 1985 to 1,817.6 in 1989 (his last year as mayor) (FBI UCR tool 2017).

control position. Voinovich would cast his first gun rights vote in favor of the gun liability bill in 2005, and before retiring from the Senate in 2010 would vote for two more gun rights bills in 2007 and 2009 (See chart on page 192).

In the House, all but three of the remaining 31 pro-control Republicans would come to shift in favor of gun rights. This included aforementioned urban representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-18th) and Clay Shaw (FL-22nd), as well as a large group of mixed district and suburban representatives. One such example was Nancy Johnson (CT-5th), a political moderate who voted for the Brady bill, Assault weapons ban, and the McCarthy background checks amendment during the 1990s and who had consistently received an 'F' rating from the NRA throughout that decade (NRA candidate positions on gun rights, 1993-2004). Throughout her Congressional career, Connecticut had been a state with some of the nation's strictest gun control laws (Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence 2012), and while the state contained no large cities on the scale of a Baltimore or Chicago, Johnson's predominantly suburban district (the now eliminated 6th district) contained parts of the small city of New Britain, which, like many others during this era, was preoccupied with rising crime (and particularly gang related gun violence)[34] in the early 1990s. Another shifter was Henry Hyde (IL-6th), a conservative who had established himself as one of the most vocal Republican pro-controllers during the 103rd Congress when he voted for the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban, crediting his crime concerned constituents (his district was primarily comprised of the Chicago suburbs) with bringing him around on the issue. He had also placed himself front and center in the post Columbine gun control debates, trying to convince Democrats and Republicans to work together on a gun control compromise package (Bruni 1999).

Johnson and Hyde were emblematic of the type of suburban close to urban area Republican who had voted for gun control during the crime concerned decade of the 1990s (for examples of similar such Republicans refer to page 90). They were also emblematic of the majority who would shift in favor of gun rights as the salience of crime as a priority

[34] In 1994, New Britain was even seeking federal funds to hire more police officers after a spate of fatal gang related shootings had left the city on high alert. An article about the shootings in the states largest newspaper, *The Hartford Courant*, reflects the fear of rising urban crime that was widespread nationally during that era. The article read, "The recent violence- the worst the police chief says he's seen in 37 years in the department-has shaken many residents' sense of security, dissolving the long-held notion they can stay safe by avoiding 'bad' areas. Carmela Price, 44, moved from the Broad Street area to Tremont Street, then to the city's outskirts, hoping to escape increasing crime. "Before, we always had bad areas where you had to be careful, areas you would try to avoid,'" Price said. "But this, it was right outside my window" (Chedekel 1994, 1).

political issue declined and the electoral significance of gun control faded with it. Whether moderates or conservatives, in competitive districts or safe ones, with their Democratic general election challengers avoiding the gun issue and primary challenges a growing concern, there was little electoral incentive for Republican pro-controllers to oppose their leadership's gun rights agenda. There were even two pro-controllers who voted for the gun liability bill (Tom Davis of Virginia's 11th Congressional district, which predominantly comprised the D.C. suburbs, and Rodney Frelinghuysen of New Jersey's 11th, which comprised suburbs of the city of Newark) whose districts were adjacent to cities that had lawsuits against gun manufacturers pending at the time of the vote (Siebel 2000). Their votes in favor of the bill indicated that supporting Washington, D.C. and Newark, New Jersey in their fight to mitigate the cost of gun violence in their cities was not a political priority or electoral concern for these representatives.

A permanent shift

It is worth pointing out that some pro-control Republicans might not have considered themselves to be shifting in favor of gun rights when they cast a 'yes' vote for the gun liability bill, instead viewing it as a one time concession to the leadership and the NRA. As suburban representative Jim Greenwood (PA-8th) told a reporter "To be really, really candid, there are a lot of us who are often at odds with the gun lobby back home who saw this as an easy vote to give them" (VandeHei 2005, 2). Yet while this may have been the intention of many at the time, most of these pro-controllers would continue to vote for gun rights legislation throughout the rest of the decade, and critically, so would the handful who remained in Congress to see the gun control debate revitalized by the Democratic party in late 2012.

One such example was Bill Young (FL-10th). A conservative representing a district that contained large swaths of the Orlando, Florida suburbs, during the previous era Young had been vocal in his support for gun control as a crime control tool, telling the House during the debate over the Assault weapons ban, "The fact is that the guns the Assault weapons ban seeks to end production of are used in criminal violence...There are those who say that banning these weapons will not prevent crime. There is no doubt this ban will not prevent all criminal activities, but if it saves the life of one innocent victim or protects one police officer patrolling our streets, then this ban is worth enacting today" (103rd Cong. Rec. H3101

(1994)). Yet by 2005, with crime rates in nearby Orlando declining,[35] like many of his pro-control colleagues in similar circumstances, Young would begin voting in favor of gun rights legislation.

And while he would pass away in late 2013, Young did not revert to his former pro-control position in later years. Instead, he would vote in favor of every gun rights amendment that came before the House from the gun liability bill vote up until his death,[36] his career NRA rating steadily improving from a 'D' in 1994 to a 'B+' by 2013. In the aftermath of the Sandy Hook shooting, Young would send out a letter to his constituents reassuring them of his support for the Second Amendment and suggesting that support for gun control was unlikely to be forthcoming. The letter read: "Some individuals in the media and in Washington believe this attack shows the need for new gun control policies...I understand the importance of our Second Amendment rights. As a gun owner myself, please know that I have and will continue to remain opposed to any measure which restricts the individual's Second Amendment right to own and possess a firearm." In this same letter, he would also use the popular anti-control argument that Congress should focus on enforcement of existing laws rather than implementing new ones, stating "We also have many laws already in place which should be adequately enforced against those who are irresponsible or criminal in their use of firearms" ("Response from Congressman Bill Young" Constituent email, 8 Jan 2013).

Chris Smith (NJ-4th) and Rodney Frelinghuysen (NJ-11th) are two more examples of former pro-controllers who voted for the gun liability bill during the 109th Congress and have since consistently supported their party's gun rights agenda. Smith, who was present during the 103rd Congress, had supported the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban, while both he and Frelinghuysen had supported the McCarthy background checks amendment during the 106th Congress. Both were political moderates representing predominantly suburban districts in New Jersey, a state with some of the nation's strictest gun control laws (Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence 2012) and where during the 103rd Congress all thirteen representatives (7 Democrats and 6 Republicans) had voted for the Brady bill and eleven the Assault weapons ban (7 Democrats and 4 Republicans). For Smith and Frelinghuysen, it was much

[35] The violent crime rate in Orlando declined from 2,342.3 per 100,000 in 1993 to 1,748.1 in 2004 (FBI UCR tool).

[36] It is notable (yet perhaps predictable) that Young's DW-nominate score increased significantly from the 103rd Congress until his death during the 113th (from .364 to .520), as did the DW-nominate scores of most Republicans who remained in Congress after the Republican Revolution of 1994.

the same story as for many other Republican pro-controllers who shifted in favor of gun rights as the pressure to support gun control to combat rising crime faded[37] and new electoral threats began to emerge. For example, Smith (who had not contested a primary since 1980) faced a challenge every election cycle from 2008 to 2016, while Frelinghuysen would similarly face a challenge in every election cycle during this timeframe except 2012.

Both individuals remained in Congress up to the 115th (2017-2018), and both have distanced themselves from their former pro-control stances. During a town hall meeting in his district in 2013, Frelinghuysen would defend his lack of support for strengthening background checks legislation (despite polling indicating that 97 percent of voters in his district supported it) stating "We need to enforce the laws we have before we enact new ones" (D'Onofrio 2013, 1). For his part Smith has remained relatively silent on the issue, releasing statements offering his condolences in the wake of mass shootings but ignoring calls to action from groups such as Moms Demand Action on Gun Reform, who staged a protest outside his office in August 2013 after Smith failed to co-sponsor legislation to strengthen background checks, which an overwhelming majority of his constituents supported (Robbins 2013).

The dissolution of the pro-control minority opposition group: Conclusions

There is not enough space in this chapter to discuss in depth every formerly pro-control Republican who shifted in favor of gun rights in the mid-2000s. Yet when it comes to understanding the Republican party's role in the shift towards near complete partisan polarization on the gun issue, the shifts of individual members are less important than the dissolution of this group as a whole. Was this merely a coincidental outcome that was little more than a group of individuals changing positions with disparate reasons for doing so? Or more plausibly, did these members face similar electoral pressures and have electoral incentives in common which changed over time? Ultimately, I contend that the decline of Republican support for gun control was the product of the latter, occurring as the salience of the crime and gun control issues faded and new electoral concerns (such as primary challenge threats) began to gain increasing significance. As the next chapter will demonstrate, the

[37] In Trenton (where Smith's suburban district was close to) the violent crime rate would decline from 2, 059.2 per 100,000 in 1991 to 1, 5795 in 2004; in Newark (close to Frelinghuysen's suburban district) the violent crime rate would plummet at a staggering rate, from 3,787.4 per 100,000 in 1993 to 980.4 in 2004 (FBI UCR tool 2017).

disappearance of this group would not be temporary, as with the aforementioned electoral pressures growing increasingly salient over time, no comparable such group has reemerged within the Republican party.

The Democratic side

While the Republican pro-control minority opposition group was dissolving, the Democratic anti-control minority opposition group grew during this decade. 32 percent of Congressional Democrats would support the gun liability bill, the largest percentage to deviate from the party line on the gun issue since the Assault weapons ban vote in 1994. As discussed previously, with party leaders having abandoned gun control as a legislative priority in the early 2000s (primarily due to the (mistaken) belief that the issue had hurt them in the 2000 presidential and Congressional elections) members who felt electorally vulnerable over the gun issue were encouraged to "reflect their districts" (Hart 2011, 2) and cross party lines in support of the Republican agenda.

The divides that had long existed in gun voting that were no longer significant for Republicans remained significant for Democrats on the gun liability bill vote- the greatest percentage of support for the bill by district type coming from rural representatives and by region from Southern representatives (refer to the graphs on pages 180 and 181). Contributing to the expansion of Democratic support for gun rights during this timeframe were several pro-control Democratic Senators who voted for the gun liability bill. This included veteran pro-controllers Jay Rockefeller, Robert Byrd (both of West Virginia), Kent Conrad (ND), and Herb Kohl (WI), all of whom had voted for the Brady bill, Assault weapons ban, and Lautenberg background checks amendments during the previous decade. While gun control supporters during the 'tough on crime' political era, by th mid-2000s there was reduced incentive to oppose gun rights, particularly as these Senators were less insulated from electoral risk over their gun votes than many of their colleagues (such as Senators Chuck Schumer (NY) or Dianne Feinstein (CA)-both of whom represented safely Democratic seats with large urban populations where a pro-control vote was arguably a safe vote). All four represented purple states[38] with sizeable rural populations and comparatively high levels

[38] A 'purple' or competitive/swing state in this context refers to a state that is not a safe victory for one party. Swing states often have mixed representation-for example, while Rockefeller and Byrd were veteran Democratic Senators from West Virginia (who up to that point had survived party realignment), in the House,

of gun ownership,[39] and both Conrad and Kohl were up for reelection the following year. Additionally, that Senate Minority leader and gun control moderate Harry Reid of Nevada himself voted for the gun liability bill illustrates the extent to which party leadership had given up on the gun control issue during this timeframe. Overall, the growth of the party's anti-control minority opposition group during this decade is demonstrative of the variable nature of the Democratic party's relationship to the gun issue, a tenuousness which will be explored in depth in the following Chapter.

A pro-gun rights decade

There is simply not enough space in this thesis to analyze all the gun rights votes that took place during this decade. In terms of analytical focus, the DC Personal Protection Act was chosen for its comparative value (with House votes in 1999 and 2004 on the same legislation), while the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act was chosen because it was considered to be a landmark legislative victory for gun rights advocates (Spitzer 2012), NRA executive president Wayne Lapierre stating after its passage that "the Second Amendment is probably in the best shape in this country that it's been in decades" (Stolberg 2005, 2). Yet in addition to these two bills, the remainder of the 2000s saw the passage of several more gun rights amendments, even as the Republican leadership's gun rights pursuit was tempered by the party losing majority control of Congress and the ability to agenda set during the 2006 midterm elections.

These additional gun rights votes are critically important, for they illustrate a continued pattern of Republican unity and Democratic division first seen in the DC handgun ban repeal and gun liability bill votes. Throughout the decade, the Republican party remained united in support of gun rights irrespective of legislative specifics, while Democrats were more divided on some votes than others- an indication that such specifics remained relevant for Democratic voting on gun rights. For example in the Senate, 32 of 42 Democrats (76 percent) supported a gun rights amendment in 2007 which prohibited international organizations and agencies who received funding from the U.S government from requiring

there were two Democrats and one Republican, while West Virginia had voted Republican for the presidency since Gore's election in 2000.

[39] While no data from 2005 is publicly available, a 2015 study of gun ownership levels by state found that West Virginia ranked 4th, North Dakota 9th, and Wisconsin 20th in a ranking of highest gun ownership percentages by state (Kalesan et al 2015).

registration of or taxing guns owned by American citizens. In comparison, only 85 of 230 House Democrats (37 percent) supported a 2008 bill which would repeal regulations relating to the possession and sale of firearms in Washington, D.C. in order to comply with the 2008 *District of Columbia v. Heller* 554 U.S 570 (2008) Supreme Court decision.[40] Notably, this 37 percent support was an increase from the 26 percent of House Democrats who had voted to repeal the D.C. handgun ban in 2004- an increase in support plausibly related to the Supreme Court's determination that the gun controls of Washington, D.C. were unconstitutional. And while there were clearly disparate Democratic divides in support between these two votes (76 percent support for one bill compared to 37 percent for the other) both had overwhelming Republican support (100 percent for the 2007 Senate vote and 97 percent for the 2008 House vote). As is evident in the below table, this pattern held across votes throughout the decade.

[40] In this landmark 5-4 decision the Court, reversing almost sixty years of legal precedent, ruled that the Second Amendment protects an individual right to possess a firearm unconnected with militia service, for traditionally lawful purposes such as self-defense. After qualifying the existence of this individual right, the Court further determined that Washington, D.C.'s handgun ban and requirement that lawfully-owned rifles and shotguns be kept "unloaded and disassembled or bound by a trigger lock" was unconstitutional (*District of Columbia v. Heller* 554 U.S 570 (2008)). It was the first time in the Court's history that it had adopted an individualist interpretation of the Second Amendment; all prior rulings, including the precedent setting case *United States v. Miller 307 U.S. 174* (1939), had supported some version of a militia based interpretation (Spitzer 2012). In 2010 the Court ruled 5-4 in *McDonald v. City of Chicago* 561 U.S. 742 (2010) that this individualist interpretation of the Second Amendment applied to the states as well.

Table 7: Congressional gun rights votes (2006-2009)

Legislation	What it contained	Democrats	Republicans	Measure of polarization
Disaster Recovery Personal Protection Act[41] (2006) (House)	Amended federal emergency statute laws to prohibit the confiscation of legally possessed firearms during national emergencies or natural disasters.	98 yes (50%) 98 no (50%)	223 yes (99.5%) 1 no (0.5%)	.49
Vitter amendment to Homeland Security Appropriations Act of 2007 (2006) (Senate)	Same as above	28 yes (64%) 16 no (36%)	55 yes (100%)	.36
National Capital Security and Safety Act (2008) (House)	Repeal regulations relating to the possession and sale of firearms in Washington, D.C., so as to comply with the requirements of the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of The District of Columbia v. Heller	85 yes (37%) 145 no (63%)	183 yes (97%) 5 no (3%)	.60
Vitter amendment to the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act of 2008 (2007) (Senate)	Prohibit the use of funds by international organizations, agencies, and entities that require the registration of, or taxes guns owned by, citizens of the United States.	32 yes (76%) 10 no (24%)	48 yes (100%)	.24

[41] This bill was drafted in response to allegations that the New Orleans police department had gathered and not returned some 700 lawfully owned firearms in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in August 2005.

Wicker Amendment to the 2010 budget resolution (2009)	Amendment to ensure that law abiding Amtrak passengers are allowed to securely transport firearms in their checked baggage.	22 yes (67%) 11 no (33%)	41 yes (98%) 1 no (2%)	.31

Chapter Six: The Republican shift (Conclusions)

In conclusion, the 2000s were best characterized as a pro-gun rights decade for Congress- a major shift from the previous decade, when Congress had passed the most significant federal gun controls in the nation's history. It was a period of transition for the Republican party. The Republican leadership, taking advantage of a window of political opportunity (due to the declining electoral salience of the crime and gun control issues and president Bush's presidential victory), shifted from a defensive strategy to prevent the enactment of new gun controls to an offensive one to pursue legislation to strengthen gun rights- establishing an agenda setting precedent for the party that has continued up to the present. The Republican party would come to unite in support of gun rights, its pro-control minority opposition group dissolving to just a handful of members as old electoral pressures and incentives influencing voting were replaced by new ones. Meanwhile, as Democratic party leaders abandoned gun control as a legislative priority and encouraged party members to vote their constituencies, support for gun rights would increase- the party's anti-control minority opposition group growing as the Republican pro-control group dissolved. As the following chapter will demonstrate, it would be nearly a decade before the Democratic party's minority opposition group would similarly dissolve, bringing about the most partisan polarized gun control and gun rights votes in Congressional history.

The declining salience of crime and the way in which it weakened the electoral significance of gun control played a critical role in making the 2000s a gun rights decade in Congress. Despite near total Republican unity leading to more partisan polarized roll call voting (as measured by the measure of polarization), this decade actually saw the parties come closer together on the gun issue, as support for gun rights increased in both. In line with the thesis's asymmetric parties narrative, it is worth clarifying that in terms of the key variables impacting each party's polarization trajectory, the decline of crime is only relevant

for understanding the dissolution of Republican support for gun control. As will be seen, the dissolution of Democratic opposition to gun control is explained by different factors. It is also worth noting that the declining electoral significance of crime/gun control coincided with the growth of conservative groups who began targeting Republicans for primary challenges. It is impossible to determine what may have happened if crime had not declined (would primary challenge pressure have superseded pressure to support gun control nonetheless?) Ultimately, while I have identified the decline in salience of the crime issue as the key variable which impacted when the Republican leadership began their gun rights pursuit and how opposition group members responded to this pursuit, it is important to recognize that this electoral change, however significant, did not occur in a vacuum.

In conclusion, in the overall story of the shift from moderate levels to hyper partisan polarization on gun control in the decades since the 103rd Congress, the key forces for change leading the Republican party to unify had been set in motion in the mid- 2000s. For Democrats, the critical changes which would unite the party nearly a decade later were not yet relevant.

Chapter Seven: The Democratic shift

On July 20, 2012, gunman James Holmes entered a film screening of *The Dark Knight Rises* at the Century 16 movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, killing twelve people and injuring 70 others before being apprehended by police in the parking lot (Pearson 2012). In the aftermath of the shooting, both Democratic President Barack Obama and Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney offered prayers and condolences to the victim's families, but neither called for the enactment of new gun control laws. While not disavowing gun control, president Obama evaded the issue during remarks at a campaign event in Fort Myers, Florida, telling the audience "There are going to be other days for politics. This, I think, is a day for prayer and reflection" (Franke-Ruta 2012, 1). When questioned about the administration's stance on gun control, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney stated that the primary focus was on the need for better enforcement of existing laws, telling the press room that "given the stalemate in Congress, our focus is on existing steps that we can take to make sure criminals and others who should not have those guns cannot obtain them" (Cohen 2012, 1). Carney further added that the Obama administration was considering additional measures (such as mental health legislation) because "tackling the broader issue of violence is not just about gun laws" (Connor and Lee 2012, 2).

For his part, Romney issued a statement of condolence which read "we are praying for the families and loved ones of the victims during this time of deep shock and immense grief" (Franke-Ruta 2012, 1). Yet despite having signed an assault weapons ban into law when he was Governor of Massachusetts in 2004 and proclaiming at the time "I do not line up with the NRA" (Wilson 2015, 142), Romney, echoing the Republican party's long held position on the issue, would state a few days later "I don't support new gun laws in our country" (Cohen 2012, 2).

While Obama and Romney's responses to the Aurora shooting invoked the ire of gun control advocates,[1] their reactions were hardly surprising. Since the parties began including

[1] President Obama in particular faced harsh criticism from the Brady campaign for his statements after the shooting, leading Brady Campaign Senior Attorney Daniel Vice to lament, "President Obama has refused to even talk about guns. In a speech today he didn't even say the word 'gun.' The closest he came was 'gunman.' Unfortunately the president has shown a lack of leadership in standing up to the gun lobby" (Yellin and Schwarz 2012, 2).

gun control stances in their official platforms beginning in 1968, no Republican presidential candidate had campaigned on a pro-control platform, while Obama's response was a continuation of the Democratic party leadership's tactical decision to distance the party from the issue that began after Al Gore's presidential election loss in 2000. And ultimately, despite several high profile mass shootings in recent years (including the Virginia Tech shooting that killed 32 in 2007 and the Tucson, Arizona shooting that killed six and critically injured Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in 2011), the gun control debate had been dormant for nearly a decade, and the chance of it being revitalized in the midst of a presidential election campaign was slim. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D:CA), a veteran gun control advocate who had sponsored the original assault weapons ban legislation that had been signed into law in 1994, expressed her pessimism on the subject on the television news program *Fox News Sunday,* telling the anchors that in Congress "people haven't rallied in years" for gun control and that with the election looming "it's a bad time to embrace the subject" (Wilson, 2015, 125). Seven years after the Republican party had unified in support of gun rights, it was evident that the Democratic party was still divided over (and its leadership still skirting) the gun control issue.

Yet a month after president Obama was re-elected to serve a second term in office, a mass shooting at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut would provide the impetus for the Democratic leadership to reestablish gun control as a legislative priority for the party. As president Obama announced the creation of a task force to put together recommendations for a renewed gun control agenda, it appeared that the Congressional gun control debate was about to be revitalized in late 2012. But after a near decade of dormancy on the issue, how would the parties respond? This chapter will focus on the Democratic party's reclaiming of the gun control issue in the years after the Sandy Hook shooting in December 2012. It will demonstrate that while the shift was not immediate, due to the replacement of red, high gun ownership state Democrats and most purple state Democrats swinging in support of the party agenda, the Democratic anti-control minority opposition group would dissolve. With Republicans remaining united on the gun issue as they had been since the mid-2000s, this Democratic shift would lead to the most partisan polarized gun control and gun rights votes in Congressional history, culminating in near complete polarization on the issue.

Part I: Reclaiming gun control as a legislative priority

The Sandy Hook shooting

On December 14, 2012, Adam Lanza killed 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut before turning a gun on himself. In a speech from the White House delivered the day after the shooting, president Obama diverged from what had become his standard position of offering condolences and skirting questions about gun control, instead delivering a resolute call to action. "We're going to have to come together and take meaningful action to prevent more tragedies like this" he told the press, further adding that he would use "whatever power this office holds" (Landler and Baker 2012, 2) to do so. But why, when just five months earlier in response to the Aurora shooting he had stated that "there are going to be other days for politics" was president Obama now issuing a call to action?

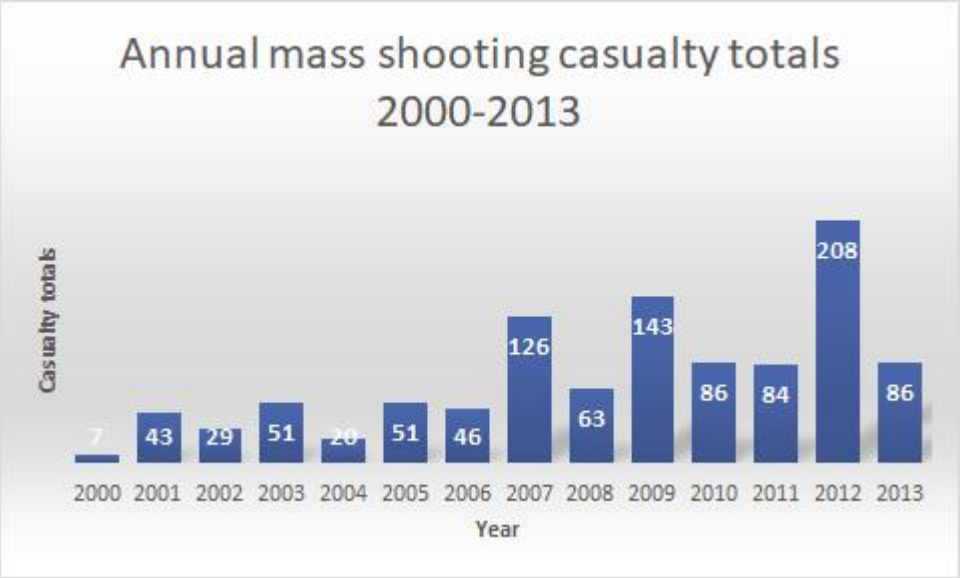
Not about crime

It is worth clarifying that the Democratic party leadership's decision to reestablish gun control as a legislative priority was unrelated to concerns about crime generally. As discussed previously, during the 1990s the Democratic pursuit of a gun control agenda was primarily a response to the crime problem, as crime rates, public concerns about crime, and public support for gun control all peaked in the early 1990s and crime remained a priority political issue for the public throughout that decade. Yet by late 2012 when the gun control debate was resurrected by the Democratic party, the political context related to crime had long since changed. The national violent crime rate had steadily decreased after peaking in 1991 (from 758.2 per 100,000 in 1991 to 387.8 in 2012) and was at its lowest level since 1970 (FBI UCR 2013), while crime had not been considered a priority political issue for the public for more than a decade. Additionally, that the 'tough on crime' political environment had long since evaporated was particularly evident in 2010, when Congress began taking bipartisan steps to reform punitive drug sentencing legislation passed during this era (Abrams 2010). Given the significant extent to which the nature of the crime debate had changed, tackling crime and bolstering the party's 'tough on crime' credentials were no longer the primary motivations behind the Democratic pursuit of stricter gun controls.

Rather, Obama's call to action and the party's recommitment to the gun control cause in the aftermath of Sandy Hook can best be understood as a 'tipping point' response to the accumulation and increasing frequency of mass shooting events in the United States.

According to a 2013 FBI report on 160 active shooter[2] incidents in the United States between 2000 (the year after the Columbine shooting discussed in Chapter Five) and 2013, there was both an increase in annual frequency of incidents and annual casualty totals over the timeframe of the study ('A study of active shooter incidents in the United States between 2000 and 2013.' Federal Bureau of Investigation Report. 16 Sept. 2013).

Graph 1: Annual casualty totals in active shooter incidents 2000-2013 (FBI)

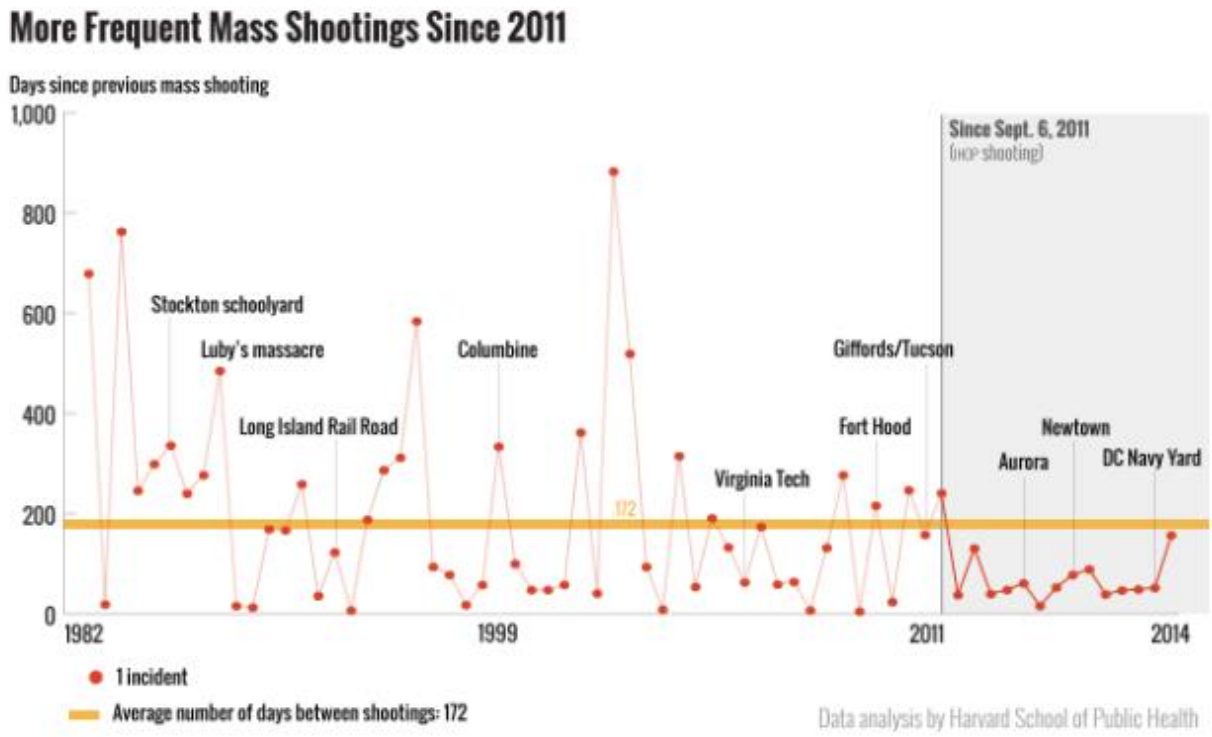


A 2014 study by the Harvard School of Public Health on mass shooting incidents (which they defined as public attacks on persons generally unrelated or unknown to the shooter and in which the shooter killed four or more people) similarly found an increase in annual casualty rates and frequency of mass shooting incidents over the timeframe studied (1982 to 2014), with a notable increase in frequency after 2011, which they described as "part of a new, accelerated process" (Cohen, Azrael, and Miller 2014, 2). The graph below depicts mass shooting incidents as red dots, with the lines connecting the dots indicative of time

[2] The FBI study defined an active shooter as an "individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area" (Federal Bureau of Investigation Report. 16 Sept. 2013, 5).

between events as measured by the y-axis (the longer the line connecting the dots, the longer the time in between events). The spike in frequency noted by the authors after 2011 is shaded in grey.

Graph 2: Frequency of mass shootings 1982-2014 (Harvard School of Public Health)



Source: Copied from Cohen, Amy, Deborah Azrael, and Matthew Miller. "Rate of mass shootings has tripled since 2011, Harvard research shows." *Mother Jones.* 15 Oct. 2014.

"These tragedies must end"

As Democratic leaders began speaking out in support of a renewed Congressional effort to enact gun controls, many emphasized that action was overdue to curtail the mass shooting epidemic that had become commonplace in the United States. President Obama would be the first party leader to do so in his White House speech the day after Sandy Hook, stating that "meaningful action" was needed because "We've endured too many of these tragedies in the past few years" (Trifunov 2012, 1). In a speech on the House floor three days later, Minority leader Nancy Pelosi (CA-12th) would echo the president's words, further adding "let's show that not only do we offer words, we offer action- and that action will take the form of passing legislation" (113th Cong. Rec. H6821 (2012)). Senate Majority Whip

Dick Durbin (IL) penned an op-ed in *The Chicago Tribune* where he asked "What will it take?" and contended that Americans needed to come together and admit that "there must be reasonable limits on gun ownership" (Peters 2012, 1). And outside the leadership, there were several veteran pro-controllers who were particularly emphatic that taking action to address mass shootings was overdue. House representative Carolyn McCarthy (NY-5th) expressed frustration over the years of Congressional inaction, telling a reporter "The time to talk about it (gun control) should have been after the last shooting or the shooting before that," while Jerry Nadler (NY-8th) issued a challenge to Obama, calling on the president to "act on our outrage and finally, do something about this" (Landler and Baker 2012, 3).

The circumstances of Sandy Hook

The Democratic leadership's decision to reestablish gun control as a legislative priority after Sandy Hook did not appear to be driven by concerns about crime generally, but rather was a reaction to the accumulation and increasing frequency of mass shootings in the United States. Yet a question remains- why was Sandy Hook specifically the tipping point event which brought about the revitalization of the gun control debate? Why was this event considered "one too many" but not the Aurora shooting of July 2012, or the shooting of Congresswoman Gabby Giffords in January 2011, or any other previous mass shooting incident? Overall, I contend that the particular circumstances of Sandy Hook played a role in tipping the scales and galvanizing the Democratic party to recommit to the pro-control cause. On one hand, it was the second deadliest (deadliest meaning highest casualty event) mass shooting in U.S history up to that point, surpassed only by the Virginia Tech shooting of April 2007. And perhaps most significantly, it involved the deaths of young children. Summing up the sentiments of many, House Minority leader Nancy Pelosi declared in her aforementioned House floor speech "Haven't we crossed a threshold? When children in kindergarten and in school are not safe?" (113th Cong. Rec. H6821 (2012)).

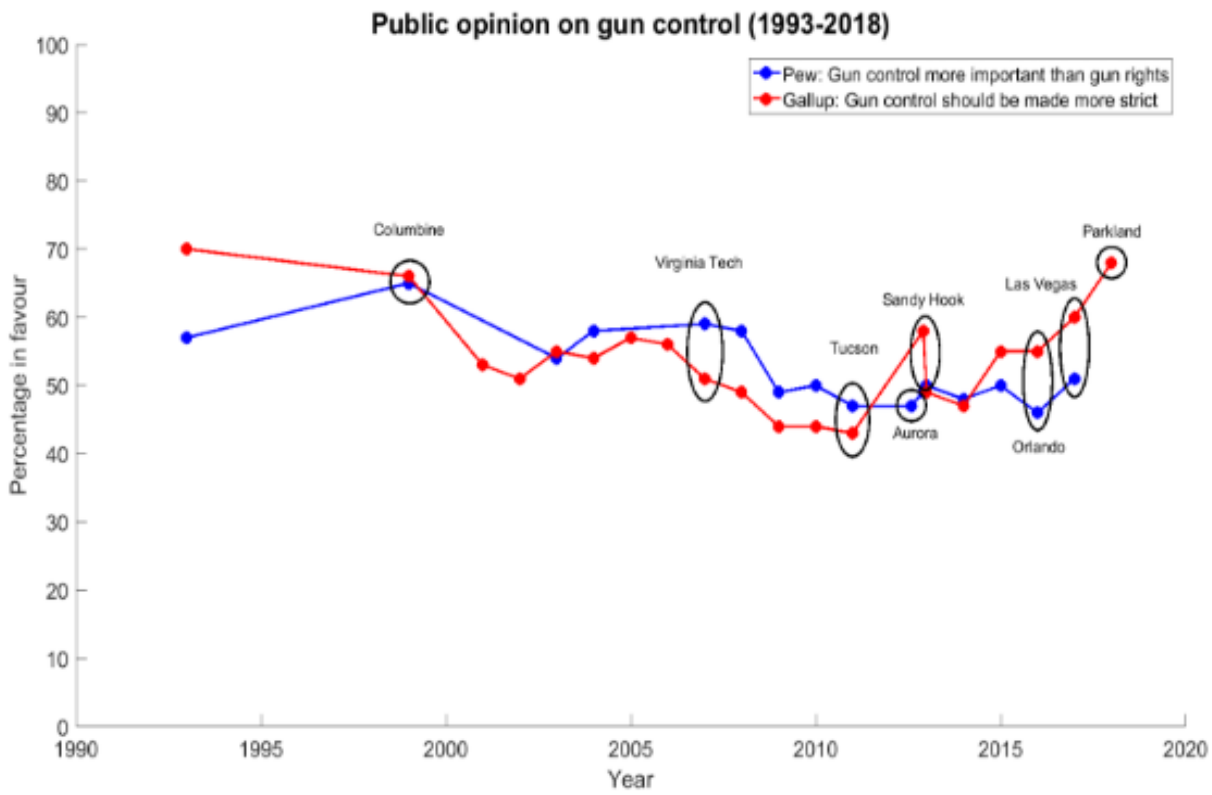
It is worth noting that Sandy Hook was not the first mass shooting to involve elementary school children. For example, five girls (aged six to thirteen) had been killed in their one room schoolhouse in the Amish community of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania in October of 2006 (Shapiro 2007). At the time no Congressional action was taken, as the event occurred during a transition period when the Republican party had united in support of gun rights and the Democratic party had abandoned the issue. Yet in late 2012, a perfect storm of

circumstances (increasing casualty rates and frequency of mass shooting events, particularly in the last year, with the most recent event being the second deadliest and involving the deaths of 20 six- and seven-year-old children) provided the political momentum necessary to tip the scales and galvanize the Democratic party into revitalizing the gun control debate. This action suggested that after a decade of dormancy, party leaders were coming to view gun control as an electorally valuable issue for the party again. And critically, it appeared that such a position had merit- for as party leaders began organizing a renewed gun control agenda, there was evidence to suggest that the American public had been similarly galvanized by the events at Sandy Hook.

Public opinion and Sandy Hook

As discussed in Chapter Three, public support for stricter gun controls peaked during the early 1990s, coinciding with peaking crime rates and public concerns about crime (refer to graph 6 on page 56). In the following decade, as the salience of crime as a priority political issue declined, Democrats abandoned gun control, and the Republican party united in favor of gun rights, public support for stricter gun controls (Gallup) as well as for controlling gun ownership over protecting gun rights (Pew) would decline, particularly in the second half of the 2000s (see graph 3 below). And while the Pew Organization had reported an uptick in public support for gun control over gun rights in the aftermath of the Columbine shooting of April 1999, in the wake of other high profile mass shootings in the following decade plus, public support either remained stable or declined, with neither organization reporting upticks- that is, until Sandy Hook. While Pew reported only a modest increase in support for gun control over gun rights (from 47 to 49 percent), the Gallup organization would report a notable increase in public support for stricter gun controls after the event (from 43 to 58 percent- see graph 3 below). And while it was too early to assess the stability of this shift in public opinion, this uptick suggested that the public was responding to the event in a way that it had not for previous mass shootings- a factor which plausibly contributed to making Sandy Hook the specific ‘tipping point’ event which led the Democratic party to recommit to the pro-control cause.

Graph 3: Public opinion on gun control (1993-2018)



The Democratic leadership: Fully committing to the gun control cause

This thesis argues that the changes in party support for gun control in the decades since the 103rd Congress were not solely the product of replacement, but were also driven by conversion- as members of both parties shifted positions on the issue as the electoral pressures and incentives influencing their voting changed. Notably, such conversion has also occurred amongst party leaders, as the revitalization of the gun control debate after Sandy Hook saw two key figures in the Democratic leadership shift to fully embrace the gun control cause: President Barack Obama and Senate Majority leader Harry Reid.

The conversion of Barack Obama

In an interview with NBC news anchor Lester Holt in the final days of his presidency, Barack Obama recalled the moment he found out that 20 six-and-seven-year old children had been killed at Sandy Hook elementary school, calling it “my worst day as president.” He

went on to call Congress's failure to enact gun control in the wake of the event "my biggest disappointment as president" (Warren 2017, 1). Over the course of his eight-year tenure in the White House, Obama had evolved from gun control avoider to passionate gun control advocate, with Sandy Hook marking the critical turning point in his conversion.

President Obama's call to action speech the day after Sandy Hook was the first major public indication that the Democratic party was recommitting to the gun control cause. Yet despite his moving rhetoric, many gun control advocates were skeptical given Obama's repeated avoidance of the issue since taking office. In response to the president's speech, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg (I) (a staunch gun control advocate and head of the pro-control group Mayors Against Illegal Guns) stated that "Calling for 'meaningful action' is not enough. We need immediate action...We have heard all the rhetoric before. It's time for the president to stand up and lead" (Landler and Baker 2012, 2). Critics of the president were justified in their skepticism- for Obama, while not a gun rights advocate, had not taken a strong pro-control stance during his presidency up to that point.

Even before taking office, he had largely avoided the gun control issue during his 2008 presidential campaign,[3] leading Brady Campaign president Paul Helmke to lament that "no political candidate at any level, in any race, would admit to supporting what the Brady Campaign considers 'sensible gun laws'-including Barack Obama!" (Wilson 2015, 135). Early in his first term, he would earn an 'F' rating from the organization for failing to make gun control a legislative priority, instead signing into law two bills expanding gun rights- one allowing firearms to be brought into national parks, the other allowing passengers on Amtrak trains to carry firearms in their luggage (Wilson 2015). After the shooting of Congresswoman Gabby Giffords in January 2011, president Obama offered condolences but did not call for stricter gun controls, focusing instead on the need to enforce existing gun control laws. He would repeat this pattern a year later after the Aurora shooting in July 2012 (Cohen 2012).

Obama's treatment of gun control during his first term was emblematic of the way in which Democratic party leaders had come to handle the issue for over a decade. When he was

[3] The gun control issue did not strongly feature in the 2008 presidential campaign-instead foreign policy, the economy, and healthcare were the top issues, as evidenced by the televised presidential debates, where questions and discussion of these issues predominated. Incidentally, no gun control related questions were posed to the candidates during any of the three presidential debates (Commission on Presidential Debates, Sept 26, October 7, and Oct 15, 2008).

sworn in as president in January 2009, party leaders had long since abandoned gun control as a legislative priority, and after eight years under a Republican president, Obama and the Democrats had more pressing agenda goals (such as Obama's healthcare plan) that superseded gun control (Collinson 2016). With presidential position taking being "inherently party polarizing" (Lee 2009, 10), taking a strong pro-control stance when the issue lay dormant would be a waste of political capital; it was safer politically for Obama to not overreach and continue to tread carefully around the issue as party leaders had done since the early 2000s.

Yet after Sandy Hook, Obama would change, taking a firm stance and pushing for gun control for the remainder of his presidency. Why was this event a turning point for Obama on the issue? After all, it was not the first mass shooting to take place during his presidency. Yet as discussed previously, the increasing frequency and deadliness of mass shootings, coupled with the age of the Sandy Hook victims, led to a 'tipping point' response from many Democrats. The president's 'enough is enough' mentality appeared to be genuine, coalescing after he found himself faced with having to comfort the Sandy Hook parents and the siblings of the victims, a painful event which he described in his NBC news interview. He frequently shed tears in interviews and speeches where he discussed gun control in the years after Sandy Hook- for example doing so in a 2016 speech where he stated "Every time I think about those kids, it gets me mad" (Luckerson 2016, 1).

But while his conversion may have been driven by his personal experiences related to the event, one cannot dismiss how the president's political and electoral circumstances had changed. Sandy Hook occurred a month after president Obama had secured his second term in office; not having to face reelection again gave him more freedom to advocate for causes he cared about and to focus on legacy building. In 2013 and 2016 he would sign a combined 40 executive actions on gun control, flexing his presidential muscle in a move indicative of a second term president no longer concerned about being polarizing. He even drew attention to these circumstances in a press conference announcing the latter batch of executive actions, telling the audience "I'm not on the ballot again. I'm not looking to score some points" (Luckerson 2016, 1).

Drawing on his presidential authority to lead on the issue (Neustadt 1960, Skowronek 2004), Obama's call to action after Sandy Hook was critical for the revitalization of the gun

control debate by the Democratic party, as after over a decade of the party having distanced itself from the issue, his call served as a catalyst- galvanizing the Democratic leadership to rally behind their president, with the pro-control party majority more than willing to see the party pursue the enactment of gun controls again. Without the support of party leaders, there was little chance of a pro-control agenda making headway in Congress, as representative Mike Quigley (D:IL-5th) had bemoaned in a 2010 interview with political newspaper *The Hill*, where he stated that he "couldn't even get a hearing" (on gun control) and laid the blame squarely on his party's leadership, stating "I'm not blaming the Republicans. I'm blaming the Democratic leadership and the (Obama) administration. They're in charge...It's a question of priorities" (Hart 2011, 3). Thus Obama's commitment to the pro-control cause was absolutely crucial if the party were to reestablish gun control as a legislative priority, and his conversion from avoider to passionate advocate would not be fleeting, as the rest of the chapter will demonstrate. Ultimately, Obama's decision to advocate for gun control in the years after Sandy Hook was in some regards reminiscent of former president Bill Clinton's insistence that gun control be included as part of the party's anti-crime package during the 103rd Congress. While one president was responding to the killing of schoolchildren and the other to concerns about rising crime, both would be instrumental to the Democratic party's pursuit of gun control during their respective presidencies.

The conversion of Harry Reid

President Obama was not the only member of the Democratic leadership to transform into a passionate gun control advocate as the party recommitted itself to the pro-control cause. Joining him would be Senate Majority leader Harry Reid, who, unlike the rest of his colleagues in the Congressional leadership (including House Minority leader Nancy Pelosi, House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer, and Senate Minority Whip Dick Durbin- all of whom were career pro-controllers) had at times been an adversary of gun control during his tenure in Congress.

Since the Democratic party did not have majority control of the House during the 113th Congress (2013-2014), the most viable avenue to begin pursuit of their gun control agenda was through the Senate, where Harry Reid was the Majority leader. With agenda setting control, the party relied on Reid's cooperation if any gun control legislation were to be debated in the Senate, and he would fulfill his duty to facilitate the wishes of the party

majority. However, while his role as Senate Majority leader necessitated that he put legislation sought by the party majority on the floor, it did not compel him to vote for it. Yet Reid would surprise many when he voted in favor of both gun control amendments that would be considered, including for the Assault weapons ban, which he had twice opposed during his career.

What explains his shift in support of the ban? For his part, Reid would credit his conscience with driving his reversal of position, telling the Senate "Today I choose to vote my conscience. Not only is Harry Reid a United States Senator but also a husband, a father, a grandfather...I choose to vote my conscience because if innocents are gunned down in a classroom, theater or restaurant, I would have trouble living with myself as a Senator, as a husband, a father, or grandfather and friend, knowing that I didn't do everything in my power to prevent that incident" (113th Cong. Rec. S2751 (2013)). Invoking one's conscience as a justification for gun control support was not a new phenomenon in the aftermath of Sandy Hook, nor historically have such defenses been exclusive to Democrats, as was evident in the rhetoric of Republican gun control supporters during the 103rd Congress.[4] Setting aside his conscience claims, how had Harry Reid's political circumstances changed over time which might shed light on his decision to fully commit to the party cause?

Over the timeframe that this thesis covers (the 103rd Congress of 1993-1994 to the 115th of 2017-2018), Harry Reid's relationship to the gun control issue can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, which took place during the crime concerned decade of the 1990s, he had a 'C' rating from the NRA, indicating a "mixed voting record" on the issue. Harry Reid was emblematic of the type of politically moderate, purple state Democrat during this era who was often a gun control moderate. Individuals like Reid, who represented the state of Nevada (which had moderate levels of gun ownership),[5] faced competing pressures on both sides of the issue (such as concerns about rising crime from urban voters versus

[4] Defending their votes for the Assault weapons ban during the 103rd Congress, Republicans Sherwood Boehlert (NY-23rd), Amo Houghton (NY-31st), and Henry Hyde (IL-6th) would all claim to have followed their conscience- Boehlert stating "I couldn't live with myself... if I didn't respond to the dictates of my conscience (103rd Cong. Rec. H3101 (1994)), while Houghton said the intention behind his vote was to "do the right thing in terms of my own heart" (103rd Cong. Rec. H3905 (1994)). Lastly, speaking to reporters after the vote, Hyde would state, "I'm catching hell, as I knew I would...But I did the right thing" (Seelye 1994).

[5] From the 103rd Congress (1993-1994) up to the present, Nevada has consistently ranked within the top twenty-five states in terms of highest gun ownership levels (Timmons 2015, Kalesan 2015).

opposition to gun control from suburban or rural gun owning constituents) and were less insulated from electoral risk than their colleagues such as Chuck Schumer (NY) or Dianne Feinstein (CA), who represented blue states with comparatively low gun ownership levels. Overall, Reid's voting record during this decade reflected a position of moderation on the gun control issue, as he supported background checks legislation (voting for the Brady bill in 1993 and the Lautenberg amendment in 1999) but opposed the Assault weapons ban in 1994.

The second phase of Reid's relationship to the gun issue would occur after the Democratic leadership made the tactical decision (due to the belief that gun control had contributed to Al Gore's presidential election loss in 2000) to abandon gun control as a legislative priority beginning in the early 2000s. With the crime and gun control issues on the political backburner and the Democratic leadership encouraging party members to vote their constituencies, individuals who wanted to boost their moderate credentials or who felt electorally vulnerable over the gun issue were free to vote for the Republican gun rights agenda. Harry Reid would be among a sizable group of politically moderate, purple state Senators to support gun rights legislation throughout the decade, even after he became a member of his party's leadership (as Senate Minority leader) beginning in 2005. During this timeframe, Reid was perhaps best described as "a generally pro-gun candidate" as deemed by his B rating from the NRA- a higher mark from the organization than during the previous decade, indicating a more pro-gun voting record.

The third and shortest phase of Reid's relationship to the gun issue began in 2013, as he transitioned from a near decade as a gun rights supporter to an outspoken gun control advocate before retiring in 2017. How had Reid's political circumstances changed with the revitalization of the gun control debate by his party? Perhaps the most significant change involved shifting party dynamics and his leadership role. While Reid had been a member of the Senate Democratic leadership (as either Minority or Majority leader) since 2005, he had never held the position when the president and his colleagues in the leadership were committed to pursuing gun control as a legislative priority. As a party leader, there is an expectation (from other leaders, the party majority, and even the public) that one will not only facilitate but also support the party's legislative agenda goals (Sinclair 2006, 123). During the previous era when party leaders had abandoned the issue and encouraged members to vote their constituencies, Reid was free to cross the party line and support the Republican gun rights agenda, even once he became a member of the leadership himself. Yet

in 2013, as the Majority leader in a hyper partisan Senate about to debate a key legislative priority for his party's president, leadership, and party majority, crossing the party line would not be so easily ignored or accepted by the pro-control caucus. Overall, his leadership position undoubtedly generated a degree of pressure to vote the party line that he would not have faced had he remained just a Senator from Nevada.

Yet on the other hand, despite the newfound pressure related to his leadership role, Reid had other electoral concerns to contend with, and fully embracing his party's cause was not without electoral risk. For example, Reid's circumstance as a representative of a purple, moderate gun ownership level state had not changed, and his last reelection victory in 2010 against a conservative Republican challenger had been won by a close margin (less than 6 percentage points, when in the previous contest in 2004 he had won by 26)(Federal Election Commission). Having consistently won reelection to the Senate as a gun control moderate and then as a gun rights supporter, suddenly shifting to become a vocal pro-controller was entering unexplored and potentially electorally risky territory for the politically moderate Senator. However, the revitalization of the gun control debate potentially introduced new electoral incentives for Reid to support gun control, particularly with polling indicating a notable shift in public support after Sandy Hook. Lastly, there is the possibility that Reid had already decided by this point[6] that he would not seek reelection in 2016. No longer concerned about potential electoral threats, he could focus on shaping his legacy as a principled member of the Senate, an explanation which fits with the passionate crisis of conscience speech that he would deliver on the Senate floor during these debates.

Whatever his reasons for doing so, Reid's shift on the Assault weapons ban after a decade of voting for gun rights was a noteworthy indication that the political environment and electoral incentives for Democrats were changing. As the only member of the Congressional Democratic leadership to not be a veteran pro-controller prior to Sandy Hook, his support legitimized and solidified the party's commitment to reestablishing gun control as a legislative priority.

[6] Reid announced that he would not be seeking reelection in March 2015, citing a January 2015 exercise injury that left him nearly blind in one eye and which caused him to "reevaluate his life and career" (Raju 2015, 1). A source close to Reid told *Politico* that he had in fact made the decision in the months prior to this injury; whether or not he was already considering retirement in 2013 is unknown, but remains a possibility.

The Republican response

While in the days after Sandy Hook the Democratic party appeared to be mobilizing towards resurrecting their long dormant gun control agenda, the Republican party, which had been united in support of gun rights for nearly a decade, continued to respond as it had in the aftermath of the most recent spate of mass shootings, its members offering condolences but not mentioning the gun issue. Speaking on behalf of the leadership, Senate Minority leader Mitch McConnell released a statement which read "We stand with the people of Newtown today and in the days ahead. We can do nothing to lessen their anguish, but we can let them know that we mourn with them, that we share a tiny part of their burden in our own hearts" (Peters 2012, 1). Additionally, House Majority leader Eric Cantor and Speaker John Boehner would issue their own statements of condolence, Cantor tweeting "As a father, my thoughts and prayers are with the victims of this horrific tragedy in Connecticut" while Boehner similarly stated "our hearts and souls go out to these families and the tragedy that they've all been through" (Walsh 2013, 1).

However, it would not take long for party members to move beyond offering 'thoughts and prayers' and begin stating that they did not believe new gun controls would be an effective policy solution for preventing mass shootings, particularly as it became clear that the Democratic party was serious about resurrecting the debate. When pressed on the issue a few days after his initial response, Speaker John Boehner would echo the oft repeated anti-control argument that Congress should focus on enforcing existing laws, telling a reporter "I think that what's appropriate at this point is to look at all the laws that we already have on the books to make sure that they're working as they were intended to work" (McGreal 2012, 1). On the television news program *Fox News Sunday,* Senator Lindsey Graham (SC) stated that he would not support a renewal of the Assault weapons ban if it were brought before the Senate, telling the anchors, "I think the assault weapons ban didn't work then. It's not going to work now, and I will oppose it" (Strauss 2012, 1). Many Republicans, such as representative Lamar Smith (TX-21st), stressed the need to focus on mental health legislation instead of gun laws, Smith releasing a statement that read "rather than curbing constitutional rights, we should focus on the underlying causes of these acts, including addressing mental illness and violence in the media" (Horwitz and Finn 2012, 2).

Presidential leadership and heightened polarization

A few days after Sandy Hook, President Obama appointed Vice president Joe Biden to lead a federal gun violence task force to draft policy recommendations to address the issue of gun violence. Over the following weeks, Biden and his task force (which did not include any Congressional Republicans, which could only have heightened partisan animus) met with gun control groups, gun rights groups, law enforcement, religious leaders, and family members of gun violence victims in order to prepare policy recommendations for the President (Levs 2013). On January 16, 2013, slightly over a month after the shooting, President Obama held a press conference announcing his gun violence initiative- the most ambitious federal gun control reform package in almost two decades.

This initiative included both recommendations for Congress and 23 executive actions, most of which were relatively modest provisions with an aim to strengthen the enforcement of existing laws and encourage federal agencies and state governments to share information (Baker and Shear 2013). Nonetheless, many Republicans reacted with indignation, publicly accusing the president of abuse of power and disrespecting the Second amendment. Representative Tim Huelskamp (KS-1st) issued a long statement criticizing the president, part of which read "The right to bear arms is a right, despite President Obama's disdain for the Second Amendment and the Constitution's limits on his power" (O'Keefe 2013, 1). Senators Marco Rubio (FL) and Chuck Grassley (IA) expressed similar sentiments, Rubio stating that "President Obama is abusing his power by imposing his policies via executive fiat" (O'Keefe 2013, 1), while Grassley called Obama's executive actions an "attempt to poke holes in the Second Amendment" that was akin to a "power grab" (Baker and Shear 2013, 2).

While Congressional Republicans had long been united in support of gun rights, Obama's position taking and executive actions invoked a particular ire. As discussed previously, presidential position taking typically heightens partisan animus, and especially on controversial issues like gun control. If Obama had purposefully avoided being polarizing on the gun issue during his first term, his use of executive actions indicated this was no longer a concern in his second. And with Biden's decision to not include any Republicans on the gun violence task force, it appeared that Democratic leaders were no longer concerned about appearing conciliatory, treading lightly around the issue, or seeking compromise with Republicans. Ultimately, Obama's firm commitment to gun control heightened the partisan

stakes and added fuel to an already hyper polarized Republican opposition; even at this early stage, the chances of bipartisanship appeared slim. Weeks before any committee hearings were held, Senate Minority leader Mitch McConnell was already vowing to "do everything in my power as Senate Minority leader" to block upcoming gun control measures (Gerth 2013).

Revitalizing the gun control debate: Congressional action

While Obama's gun violence initiative contained 35 provisions that were a combination of Congressional and executive actions, the cornerstone of the agenda included two familiar policy proposals: to create a system of universal background checks, and to reinstate the ban on Assault weapons which had expired in 2004, while also prohibiting the manufacture of ammunition magazines containing more than ten rounds ("What's in Obama's gun control proposal," The New York Times, 16 Jan 2013). Over the next few months, the Democratic majority Senate would move on the president's recommendations, the Senate Judiciary Committee approving the assault weapons ban and background check legislation for consideration in the Senate, which would eventually be set for mid-April (Anderson 2013). For the first time in nine years, the Senate was preparing to debate and vote on gun control legislation again. Would bipartisanship reemerge, or would these votes be among the most partisan polarized gun control votes in Senate history?

From general crime to mass shootings: Shifting gun control rhetoric in the decades since the 103rd Congress

As the Senate began to debate gun control in April 2013, it had been twenty years since the debates of the 103rd Congress, which had culminated in the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban being signed into law. Then Congress had been debating gun control as a component of general crime control, while the post Columbine gun control debates of May/June 1999 had been the first to combine this general crime control focus with an emerging debate about youth violence and school shootings. With the revitalization of the gun control debate in 2013, Congress was responding specifically to a mass shooting epidemic, and in particular to an event at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut. Given the extent to which the focus of the debate had changed, how had gun control rhetoric evolved over time?

The general arguments for and against the enactment of gun control remained the same- for supporters, gun control was an effective policy solution to reduce gun violence

which does not infringe upon Second Amendment rights, while opponents argued that gun control is not effective at reducing gun violence and does infringe upon this right. Yet beyond these general arguments, the rhetoric used to justify them had evolved to fit the circumstances of the revitalized debate. With crime rates at a 40 year low and crime having ceased to be a priority political issue for over a decade, framing support for gun control in general crime control terms no longer packed the same rhetorical punch; instead, individual mass shooters had become the focus of the debate in 2013. For example, Senator Dianne Feinstein (D:CA), sponsor of both the original Assault weapons ban and the renewal amendment, had during the debates of the 103rd Congress referred to assault weapons as the weapons of choice for every "terrorist, gang member, drug syndicate, drive-by shooter, and Mafioso" (103rd Cong. Rec. S15431 (1993)). Yet during the 2013 debates, she called on the need for such a ban to stop what she referred to as 'grievance killers,' stating "Their goal is to kill indiscriminately...These are the weapons of choice of this group of people" (113th Cong. Rec. S2751 (2013)).

As another example of rhetorical change, during the 103rd Congress one of the most prolific arguments in support of the Brady bill was that it would help to protect police officers fighting crime on urban streets (for additional examples refer to page 77). As Senator Paul Wellstone (D:MN) argued in his defense of Brady, "All law enforcement people tell us they need it as a tool to fight crime and make our streets safer" (113th Cong. Rec. S1632 (1993)). In 2013 no one was relying on this argument. Rather, the more common justification for strengthening background checks legislation was to protect the lives of "beautiful little children" and "innocent babies" (in the words of Senators Dick Durbin (D:IL) and Joe Manchin (D:WV) respectively) who were being gunned down in their classrooms, in a place that was supposed to be safe for America's children (113th Cong. Rec. S2726 & S2731 (2013)).

On the opposite side of the debate, during the 103rd Congress anti-controllers had also focused on the efficacy of gun control as general crime control, determining that there were more effective solutions to reducing crime. Senator Larry Craig (R:ID) conceded that "Fear of violent crime is rising in this country" but argued that the best solution to reducing crime was not gun control but "tougher sentencing penalties" for those caught using firearms in the commission of a crime (103rd Cong. Rec. S16307 (1993)). It was a popular anti-control sentiment at the time, representatives such as Bill McCollum (R:FL-5th) suggesting

that Congress should "Take the violent criminal off the street, lock him up, and throw away the key" (103rd Cong. Rec. H9099 (1993)). Yet by 2013, with the focus having shifted from being 'tough on crime' generally to preventing mass shooting incidents specifically, anti-controllers settled on a new alternative policy solution to gun control: mental health legislation. As Senator John Cornyn (R:TX) explained, "I believe the most appropriate response to the recent mass shootings is to make sure that our current laws involving mental illness and mental health adjudications are enforced more aggressively and more efficiently" (113th Cong. Rec. S2742 (2013)). Whether it was recidivist criminals or deranged mass shooters, anti-controllers put the onus of responsibility on the individual wielding the firearm rather than on the individual's ability to access the weapon itself.

As a final point, while the mass shooting epidemic brought about the revitalization of the debate and has come to take center stage, everyday gun violence and gun deaths have not escaped the notice of gun control proponents in Congress. For example, while Senator Richard Blumenthal (D:CT) talked at length about the families of Newtown, he also added that by passing gun control "we speak also for the 3,400 or more who have perished since as a result of gun violence, and the thousands more who will die needlessly if we fail to take action" (113th Cong. Rec. S2745 (2013)). Overall, the myriad of ways in which gun control rhetoric has evolved in the decades since the 103rd Congress could comprise an entire chapter in itself. In summary, the biggest change over time is that the primary lens through which gun control is debated in Congress has shifted from gun control as a component of general crime control to gun control as a specific policy response to mass shooting events. Two quotes exemplify this change- one from Senator Nancy Kassebaum (R:KS) during the 103rd Congress and one from Senator Chris Murphy (D:CT) during the 113th. In the words of the former, gun control was primarily about "addressing a problem- escalating violent crime" (103rd Cong. Rec. 15376 (1994)), while the latter contended "We have an obligation to make sure it (a mass shooting like Sandy Hook) doesn't happen again" (113th Cong. Rec. S2740 (2013)).

Part II: The post Sandy Hook Senate votes

On April 17, 2013, President Obama called it a "shameful day for Washington" after the two key components of the Democratic party's renewed gun control agenda (amendments to strengthen background checks and ban assault weapons) both failed to receive the 60 votes

necessary to prevent a filibuster in the Senate, leading Senate Majority leader Harry Reid to pull the main bill (the Safe Communities, Safe Schools Act) from the floor (Rosenthal 2013).

The Manchin-Toomey background checks amendment

The Manchin-Toomey background checks amendment was a bipartisan bill drafted by Senators Joe Manchin (D:WV) and Patrick Toomey (R:PA) which would subject unlicensed dealers at gun shows to federal background check laws (previously referred to as 'closing the gun show loophole' in the Brady bill) and as a new addition, subject online sales of firearms to a background check (Gramlich 2013). While in this latter regard it was more expansive than previous background checks bills, it was still less strict in one major regard- it did not contain a waiting period for the purchase of a handgun.[7] Despite a majority of Senators favoring the bill, without reaching the 60 vote filibuster proof threshold the amendment failed 55-45, despite polling from several organizations indicating that a majority of the American public supported the legislation.[8] From a polarization perspective, it was not the most partisan polarized background check vote in Senate history- this distinction went to the Lautenberg amendment of May 1999 (discussed in Chapter Five), which occurred at a time when Senate Democrats were briefly united before the party abandoned the gun control issue in the following decade. In 2013 the parties were roughly equal contributors to polarization, with four members in each crossing the party line- as is evident in the table and graph below.

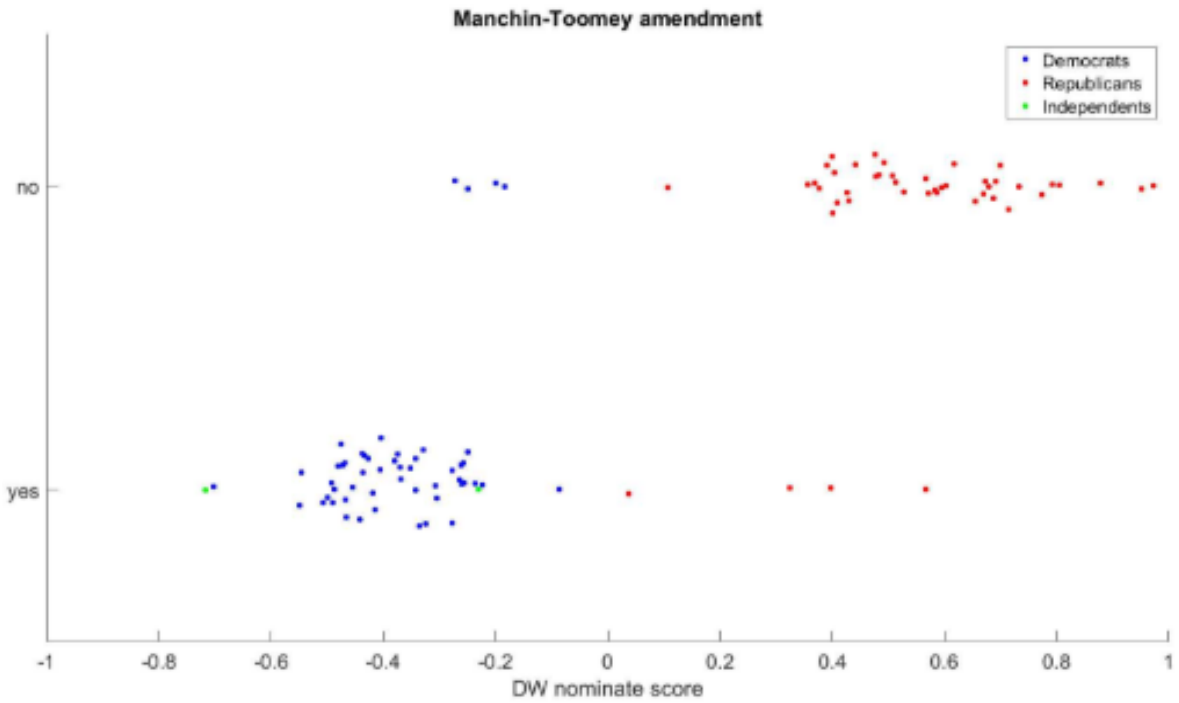
[7] For a detailed breakdown of legislative differences between background check proposals, refer to Appendix One.

[8] For example, a month prior to the debates, the Gallup organization reported that 83 percent of Americans favored requiring background checks for all gun purchases, while the Pew organization similarly reported that 85 percent of Americans supported universal background checks (Gallup 2013, Pew 2013).

Table 1: Key Senate background checks votes (1993-2013)

Legislation	Democrats	Republicans	Independents	Measure of Polarization*
Brady Bill (1993)	47 yes (85%) 8 no (15%)	16 yes (36%) 28 no (64%)	-	.49
Lautenberg amendment (1999)	44 yes (98%) 1 no (2 %)	6 yes (11%) 49 no (89%)	-	.87
Manchin-Toomey amendment (2013)	49 yes (92%) 4 no (8%)	4 yes (9%) 41 no (91%)	2 yes (100%)	.83

Graph 4: The Manchin-Toomey amendment (1st dimension DW-nominate)



The Assault weapons ban

Minutes after the failure of the Manchin-Toomey amendment, the Senate proceeded to vote on an Assault weapons ban,[9] which failed to receive even a simple majority, faltering 40-60. That it failed by a larger margin than the previous bill was unsurprising, as the ban was considered a stricter form of gun control and had previously received less Congressional support than background checks. Additionally, by 2013 public support for the ban was both significantly lower than for background checks (which had 85 percent public support) and had fallen over time (from 80 percent support in 1994 to 58 percent in 2013) (Doherty 2015).

What accounts for this decline in public support for the ban over time? There are a few plausible explanations. First, both public support for gun control generally (refer to graph 6 on page 56) as well as for an assault weapons ban specifically (the 80 percent noted above) peaked during the early 1990s, coinciding with peaking crime rates and public concerns about crime. As the electoral significance of crime faded in the early 2000s and that of gun control faded with it, public support for gun control generally began to wane in the middle of that decade (and notably in the years following the *Heller* Supreme Court decision of 2008,[10] although there is no evidence to support a causal link between the two). By the time polling organizations began asking about the ban again in 2013, it was unsurprising that support for this specific proposal did not match previous levels, as public support for gun control generally, while increasing after Sandy Hook, had not returned to the peak levels of the previous era. Additionally (and perhaps most significantly), in the years after the Republican party united in favor of gun rights beginning in the mid-2000s, Republican voter support for gun control began to notably decline (evidence of sorting which will be discussed in the following sections). This shift in the Republican electorate undoubtedly contributed to declining levels of public support for specific proposals like the assault weapons ban.

Because public support for background checks legislation had remained more stable over time and the legislation itself was viewed as less controversial than an assault weapons ban, gun control organizations like the Brady Campaign urged the Biden Gun Violence Task Force to focus their efforts on passing background checks legislation and to take a ban off the table. Speaking to reporters, Brady Campaign president Dan Gross defended the

[9] The Assault weapons ban was similar in most regards to the original 1994 ban, although it added some semi-automatic firearms to the ban list and did not include a ten-year sunset provision (Gramlich 2013).
[10] Refer to footnote 40 on page 192.

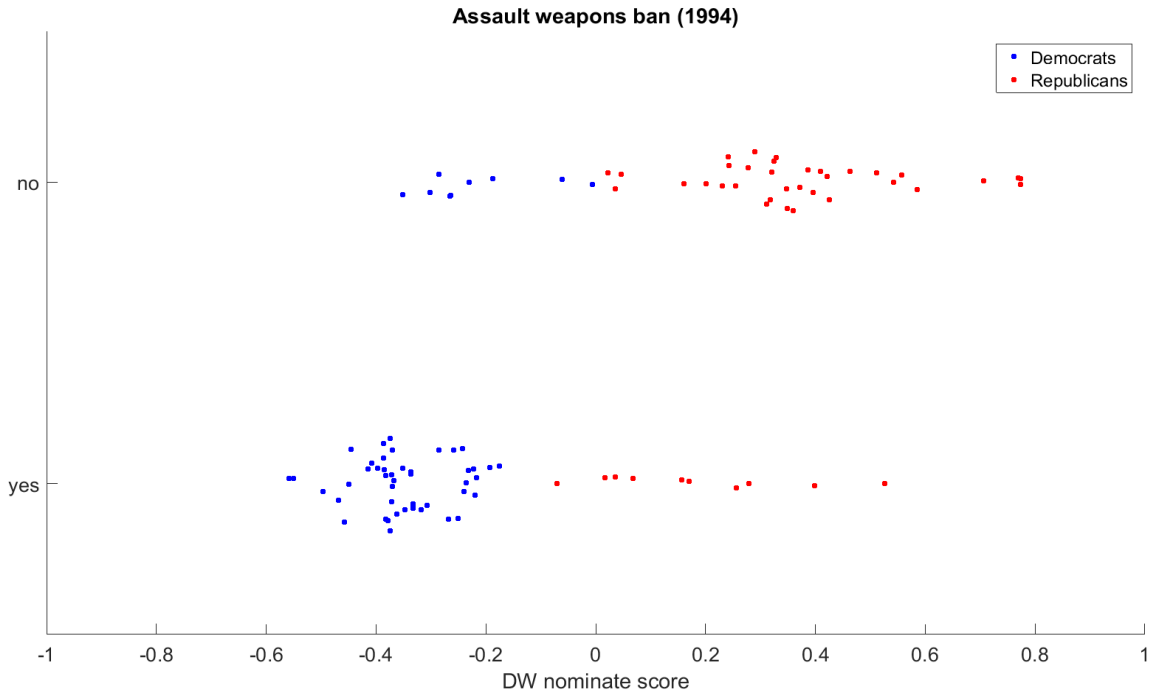
organization's decision to push solely for background checks, stating that "There's a natural gravity that happens toward the ban in the wake of tragedies...But it's very important to point out that background checks could have an even bigger impact" (Shear and Baker 2013, 2). Yet the task force did not heed this advice, *The New York Times* reporting that the Obama administration was determined to include a ban as part of their gun violence initiative despite the advice of gun control advocates (Rosenthal 2013).

Overall, while the background checks vote had briefly presented an image of equally united parties, the Assault weapons ban vote would shatter this image. For while Republicans were almost completely united in their opposition to the ban (with only veteran pro-controller Mark Kirk (IL) voting for the amendment), Democrats were divided. In fact, more Democrats opposed the assault weapons ban in 2013 than had done so in 1994 (15 Senators compared to nine).

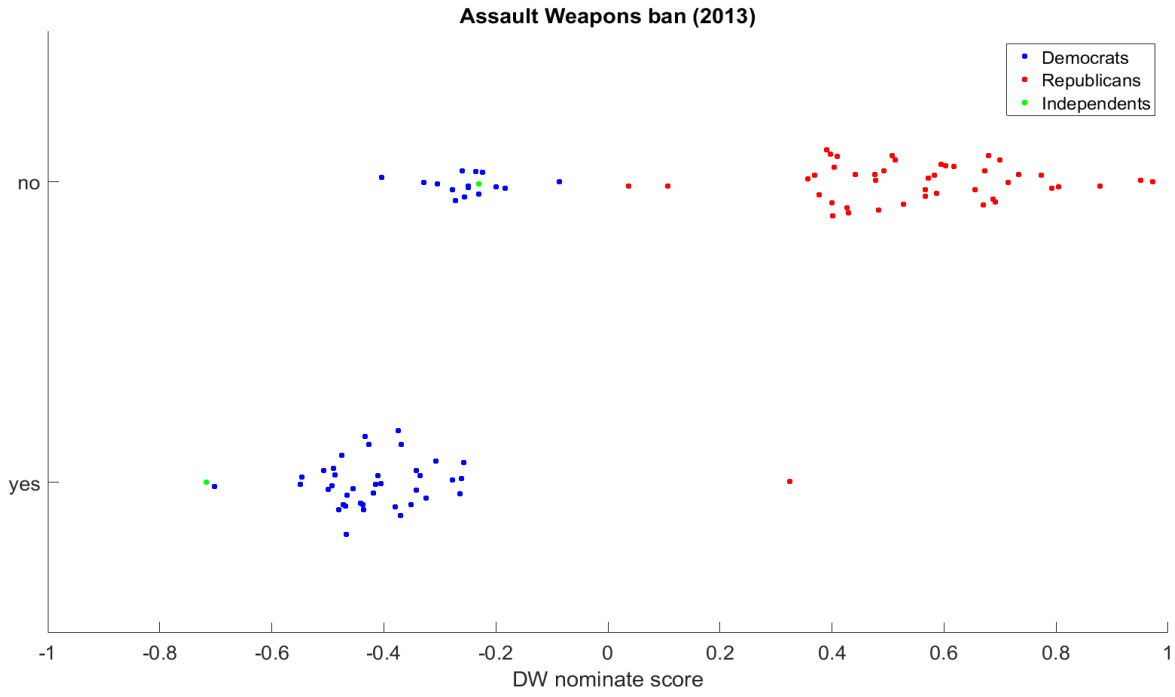
Table 2: Assault Weapons ban Senate votes (1993-2013)

Legislation	Democrats	Republicans	Independents	Measure of polarization
Assault Weapons ban (1993)	45 yes (83%) 9 no (17%)	10 yes (23%) 34 no (77%)	-	.60
Assault Weapons ban (2013)	38 yes (72%) 15 no (28%)	1 yes (2%) 44 no (98%)	1 yes (50%) 1 no (50%)	.70

Graph 5: Assault weapons ban Senate vote (1994)



Graph 6: Assault Weapons ban Senate vote (2013)



Other votes: Ammunition clips and gun rights amendments

In addition to the Assault weapons ban vote, the results of three other gun issue votes further indicated that Senate Republicans were more united on the gun issue than their Democratic counterparts (see table 3 below); the only Republican to deviate from the party line on these votes was Mark Kirk (IL). The Lautenberg amendment (not to be confused with the Lautenberg background checks amendment of 1999), was a gun control amendment which would have banned ammunition clips holding more than ten rounds. The latter two amendments were offered by Republicans and sought to strengthen gun rights- the Cornyn concealed carry reciprocity amendment by mandating that any state with a concealed weapons law, no matter how strict, would be required to recognize the concealed weapons permit of visiting residents from any other state, while the Burr amendment would have prevented veterans deemed mentally incompetent from being blocked from purchasing guns unless a court found that the individual posed a danger to the public (Sargent 2013).

Table 3: Additional gun amendments

Legislation	Democrats	Republicans	Independents	Measure of polarization
Lautenberg amendment (failed 45-55)	43 yes (80%) 11 no (20%)	1 yes (2%) 44 no (98%)	1 no	.78
Cornyn amendment (failed 58-43)	14 yes (26%) 41 no (74%)	44 yes (98%) 1 no (2%)	1 no	.72
Burr amendment (failed 54-46)	9 yes (17%) 45 no (83%)	45 yes (100%)	1 no	.83

The post Sandy Hook gun control votes: Analysis

While both parties were equal contributors to polarization on background checks, taken as a whole, the post Sandy Hook Senate votes demonstrated that Democrats remained divided on the issue, in contrast to Republicans, who despite a few defections were united in their opposition to gun control/support for gun rights. Why, despite the revitalization of the gun control debate after a decade of dormancy, had little changed?

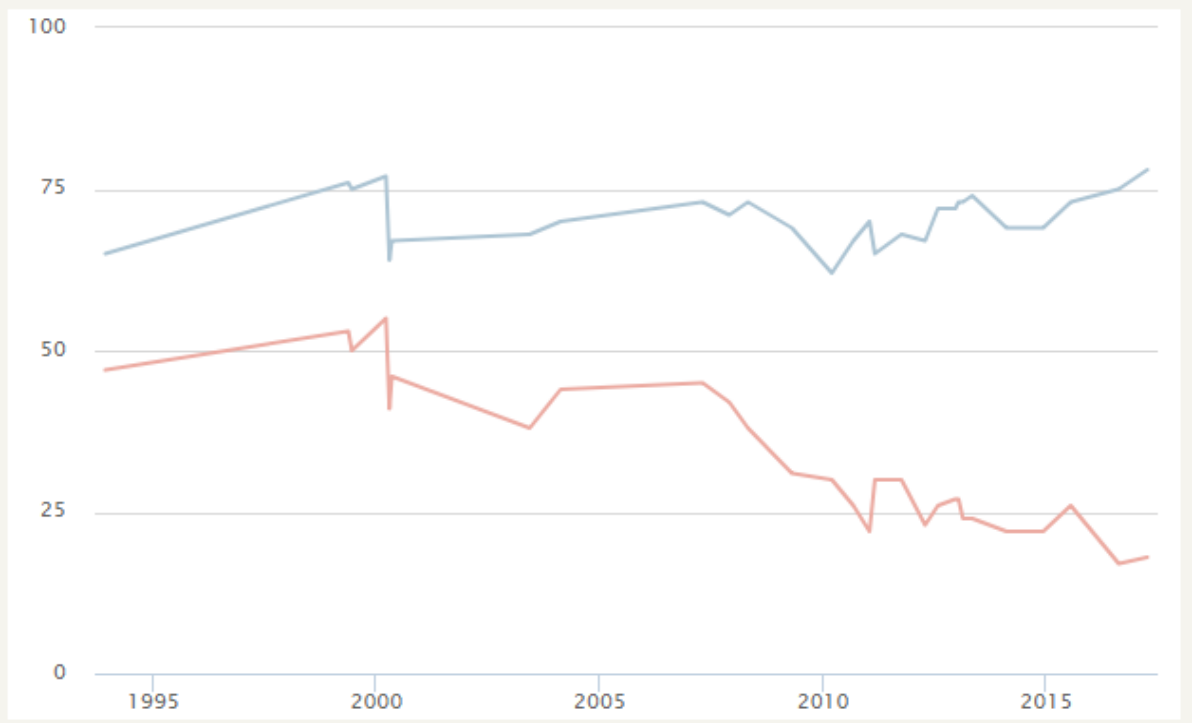
Republican unity

During the post Sandy Hook Senate debates of April 2013 there were four Republicans (Mark Kirk (IL), Pat Toomey (PA), Susan Collins (ME), and John McCain (AZ)) who crossed the party line to support background checks; three of the four (all but McCain) represented states where their co-Senator was a pro-control member of the Democratic party (or in Collins case, an Independent). Yet while these Republican defections were notable, they did not forecast a crack in the Republican anti-control facade and a return to bipartisanship-for, as later sections of the chapter will demonstrate, Toomey, Collins, and McCain would abandon their support for background checks legislation in 2016. Ultimately, despite renewed public support for gun control in the aftermath of Sandy Hook and the resuscitation of the gun control debate by the Democratic party, a comparable pro-control minority opposition group to what had once existed would not reemerge within the Republican party. If the party's initial shift in the mid-2000s was a period of transition, by 2013 the balance of electoral pressures and incentives influencing Republican voting on the gun issue was markedly one-sided.

A changing Republican electorate

To start, while the Sandy Hook shooting had appeared to galvanize the general public (refer to graph on page 203), amongst Republicans in the electorate specifically, support for gun control had significantly declined over time, as is evident in responses to the Pew Organization question "What do you think is more important-to protect the right of Americans to own guns, OR to control gun ownership?" depicted in the below graph.

Graph 7: Partisans responding it is “more important to control gun ownership” (Pew)



Source: Copied from ‘Gun rights vs. gun control.’ Pew Organization.

This decline in Republican support for gun control over time can be attributed to ‘sorting,’ the process in which partisans, responding to cues from political elites, will bring their issue positions in line with their party identification (Jacoby 1988, Hetherington 2001, Carsey and Layman 2006, Levendusky 2009, McCarty 2015). There is compelling evidence for sorting in the case of gun control, as a marked decrease in support amongst Republicans in the electorate began to emerge three years after the Republican party in Congress had united in support of gun rights. Over time, a mutually reinforcing feedback loop would emerge, as while Republican support for gun control had declined over time as partisans followed the cues of their party elites, so these elites would look to Republican voters and see little electoral incentive to support gun control.

Yet as discussed previously, when asked general versus specific questions on policy issues, the public tends to lean conservative on broad questions about the role of government and lean liberal when asked about their support for specific policy proposals (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016). So despite declining Republican support for gun control generally, polling has indicated there is strong Republican support for certain proposals such as background checks- the Pew Organization reporting in January of 2013 that 85 percent of self-identified

Republicans and 87 percent of self-identified Democrats supported universal background checks (Pew 2013). But why, if background checks had overwhelming public (including Republican) support, did only four Republican Senators support the Manchin-Toomey amendment? This question leads to an explanation of the most critical electoral change for Congressional Republicans over time- the shift from general election to primary voters as the more electorally salient voting bloc regarding the gun issue.

Primary challenge threats

One of the most significant electoral pressures that Congressional Republicans face today which plays a critical role in keeping the Republican party united in opposition to gun control is the potential of a primary defeat- an electoral threat which began to emerge during the previous decade (refer to the discussion of House representative Wayne Gilchrest on page 182) and which has become increasingly significant over time. As discussed in the previous chapter, beginning in the late 1990s conservative ideological groups such as the Club for Growth, FreedomWorks, and Heritage Action began increasingly inserting themselves into Congressional nomination politics, endorsing and funding primary challenges against incumbent Republicans they deemed to be insufficiently conservative (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016, 238). As a result, Congressional Republicans have come to face intense pressure to present themselves as "conservatives in good standing" in order to fend off and survive primary challenges (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016, 237).

Because of this pressure, in terms of a vote on legislation such as background checks, most Republicans today are more concerned about how their vote may impact their next primary (where any vote for gun control would be considered a deviation from conservative principles) rather than the general election (where, as a non priority political issue, their vote is less likely to be a decisive factor for voters, even if there is overwhelming majority bipartisan support for the legislation). For as argued previously, implicit support does not necessarily equal salience- and while public support for gun control had increased after Sandy Hook, gun control had not achieved the status of key general election issue, as it had when its electoral significance was elevated due to its link to the crime issue in the 1990s.

Remaining pro-controllers: Kirk and Coats

By the time the Senate was preparing to vote on gun control in April 2013, two pro-control Republicans from the previous era remained. One was Mark Kirk (IL), who would be the sole Republican to vote for all the Democratic gun control amendments. He had remained a pro-controller throughout his Congressional career, never having deviated even during the 2000s when most of his pro-control Republican colleagues shifted in favor of gun rights. Kirk had not faced a competitive primary challenge in years, and as a representative of the blue state of Illinois, his Democratic opponent in the general election posed a greater electoral threat. Overall, his unique political circumstances made him a Republican outlier. Yet for the other formerly pro-control Republican in the Senate, it was a different story.

Senator Dan Coats of Indiana was a conservative who had established himself as a gun control supporter when he voted for both the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban during the 103rd Congress. When the Supreme Court ruled in *Printz v. United States* 521 U.S 898 (1998) that certain provisions of the Brady bill were unconstitutional, Coats gave an impassioned speech defending the bill and stating that the Court "is actively disarming Congress in the most important conflicts of our time" (Killenbeck 2002, 104). He would retire from the Senate in 1999 in order to take the position of U.S Ambassador to Germany; following that he entered the private sector for several years. By 2010, Coats was running to reclaim his old Indiana Senate seat, in the process finding that his pro-control voting record was being used against him by his opponents at the primary stage. Former House representative and Tea Party member John Hostettler ran a television ad criticizing Coats's support for both the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban, calling them "votes against the Second Amendment" (What happened to Dan Coats? John Hostettler for U.S Senate Ad. Youtube.com). In reference to this same voting record, Indiana state Senator Marlin Stutzman publicly questioned Coat's conservative credentials, telling the news television program CNN, "I guess I would consider him (Coats) a conservative, but there are votes that people are raising their eyebrows over and saying, 'Is this the conservative we are looking for'?" (Hamby 2010, 1).

For his part, it appeared that Coats was himself concerned about this record, as he tried to distance himself from it by running campaign ads before the primary stating that he had "stood up for the Second Amendment" ("Coats for Indiana" Senate ad. 13 April 2010.

Youtube.com), although he did not elaborate on how he had done so. And while he would ultimately defeat these primary challengers and win back his Senate seat, his former pro-control position would not return to the Senate with him. In 2013 Coats would shift positions and oppose both background checks and the Assault weapons ban, defending his votes by telling reporters "I will not support legislation that fails to address the real problems that lead to gun violence and would infringe on the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens" (Blasko 2013, 1).

The shifting position of Dan Coats provides compelling insight into how electoral pressures and incentives for formerly pro-control Republicans had changed over time, and notably how the primary electorate had come to take precedence over the general. During the 103rd Congress Coats was voting for gun control at a time when crime rates in Indiana were peaking;[11] a time when due to its intertwined relationship with crime, gun control was an important general election issue. Yet twenty years later he would abandon this support after having his conservatism questioned at the primary stage, running ads not to separate himself from his primary opponents but to fit in with them.

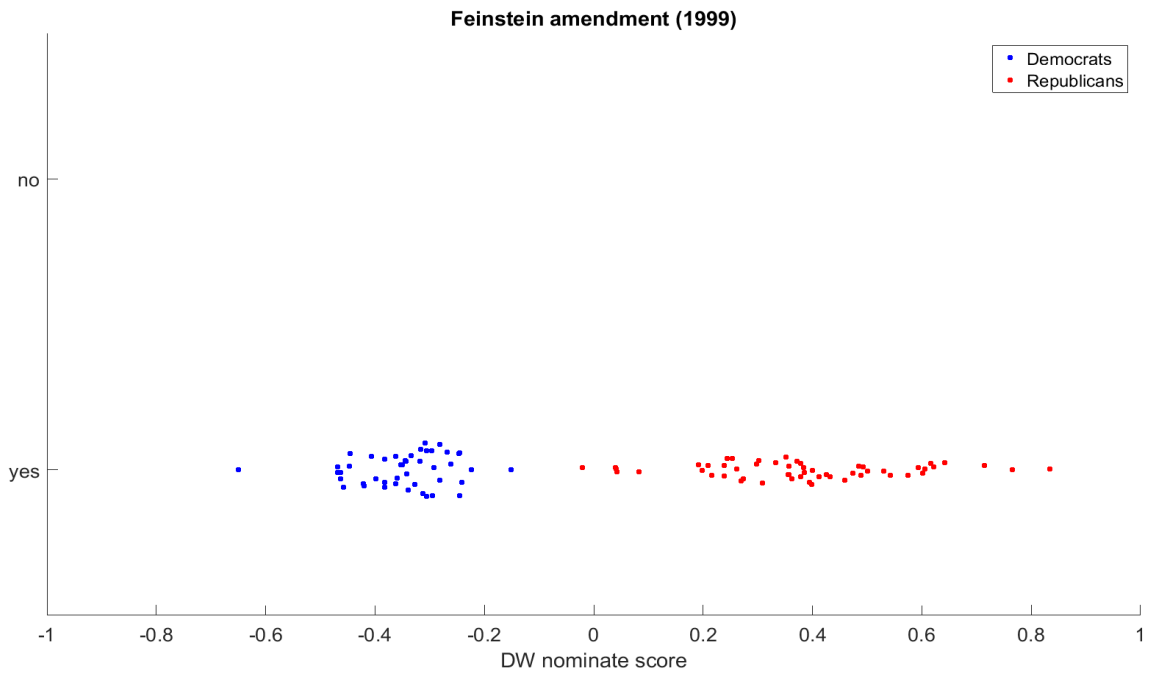
Beyond Dan Coats, one of the most striking shifts to occur over time involved an amendment to ban the importation of ammunition clips and magazines capable of firing more than ten rounds. This ammunition clip ban was last introduced by Senator Dianne Feinstein (D:CA) during the post Columbine gun control debates of 1999, where it had passed by a unanimous consent voice vote (meaning all 100 Senators supported it). Yet in 2013, the same legislation (now renamed the Lautenberg amendment) would fail 45-55, with only one Republican (Mark Kirk) voting in favor while 15 Senate Republicans would switch votes to oppose the amendment between 1999 and 2013.[12] As discussed in Chapter Five, during the previous era when crime and gun control were both electorally significant issues, even some veteran anti-controllers were occasionally willing to compromise and support some modest gun control measures. Yet by 2013, it was evident that most Republicans were not willing to support any gun control measures, regardless of the legislative specifics.

[11] During the timeframe of the 103rd Congress the state of Indiana's violent crime rate was 525.1 per 100,000, the highest recorded rate since the FBI began collecting statewide crime statistics in 1960. By 2013 when Coats abandoned his support for gun control, Indiana's violent crime rate had declined to 359.6 (FBI UCR tool 2018).
[12] This list included Jeff Sessions (AL), Richard Shelby (AL), Lisa Murkowski (AK), John McCain (AZ), Jeff Flake (AZ), Mike Crapo (ID), Chuck Grassley (IA), Pat Roberts (KS), Mitch McConnell (KY), Thad Cochran (MS), Mike Enzi (WY), Orrin Hatch (UT), John Cornyn (TX), Lindsey Graham (SC), and Jim Inhofe (OK).

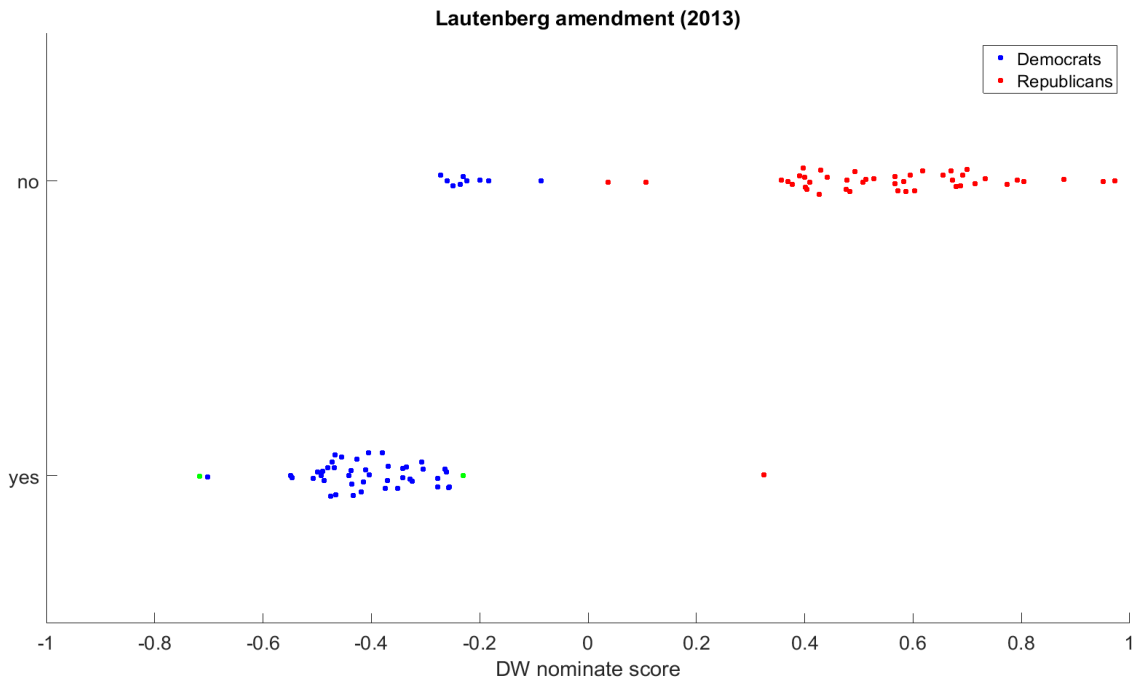
Table: 4 Ammunition clips amendments

Legislation	Democrats	Republicans	Independents	Measure of polarization
Feinstein amendment (1999)	45 yes (100%)	55 yes (100%)	-	0
Lautenberg amendment (2013)	43 yes (80%) 11 no (20%)	1 yes (2%) 44 no (98%)	1 yes (100%)	.78

Graph 8: Feinstein amendment (1999)



Graph 9: Lautenberg amendment (2013)



Divided Democrats

On the Democratic side, there was some notable evidence (particularly the shift in support for the Assault weapons ban from Senate Majority leader Harry Reid and the support for background checks from several NRA endorsed Senators) to suggest that with the revitalization of the gun control debate, a shift was beginning to occur within the Democratic party. However, while Senate Democrats were relatively united in support of background checks, the Assault weapons ban and additional gun rights votes also made clear that a sizeable group of them were not willing to fully embrace all aspects of their party's pro-control agenda. Key to understanding this Democratic divide is region. For example, of the fifteen Democrats who opposed the Assault weapons ban and fourteen who voted for the concealed carry gun rights amendment, the majority represented red or purple states in the South and West with high levels of gun ownership, half of whom were up for reelection in 2014.

Table 5: A sample of divided Democrats

Name	Voted for background checks/AWB/ Gun rights amendments?	State/Region	State for Romney in 2012?	State ranking in gun ownership levels	Up for reelection in 2014?
Mark Pryor	No/No/Yes	Arkansas (South)	Yes	2nd	Yes
Mark Begich	No/No/Yes	Alaska (West)	Yes	1st	Yes
Max Baucus	No/No/Yes	Montana (West)	Yes	6th	Yes
Heidi Heitkamp	No/No/Yes	North Dakota (Midwest)	Yes	9th	No
Jon Tester	Yes/No/Yes	Montana (West)	Yes	6th	No
Mary Landrieu	Yes/No/Yes	Louisiana (South)	Yes	10th	Yes
Joe Manchin	Yes/No/Yes	West Virginia (South)	Yes	4th	No

Kay Hagan	Yes/No/Yes	North Carolina (South)	Yes	17th	Yes
Tom Udall	Yes/No/Yes	New Mexico (West)	No	7th	Yes

Sources: gun ownership levels: Kalesan (2015); 2012 presidential election results: Federal election commission.

Additionally, Democrats who felt electorally vulnerable over the gun issue were freer to cross the party line than their Republican colleagues. For while the primary over the general electorate was the more salient voting bloc for most Republicans by this point (with the exception of blue state Senator Mark Kirk), for Democrats in red or purple states it was the opposite. While primary challenge threats were not a major electoral concern for Democrats generally (a critical difference between the parties which will be discussed later in the thesis), a primary challenger looking to unseat a Democratic incumbent in a red, high gun ownership state had little to gain by attacking the incumbent over their lack of gun control support. That Southern NRA endorsed Senators like Joe Manchin (WV) and Mark Warner (VA) (both of whom had publicly expressed support for restrictions on assault weapons in the days following the shooting[13]) ultimately cast votes against the ban epitomized the struggle for many Democrats between rallying behind the national party cause and protecting their individual electoral concerns.

In conclusion, the Democratic divide on the gun control issue in 2013 is perhaps best exemplified in the response of anti-control Senator Max Baucus (MT) to a reporter asking why he had opposed both gun control amendments. Baucus, who was facing reelection in 2014 in a state with the fifth highest gun ownership levels in the country,[14] merely responded "Montanans" and walked away (Rosenthal 2013, 2).

The post Sandy Hook Senate votes: Conclusions

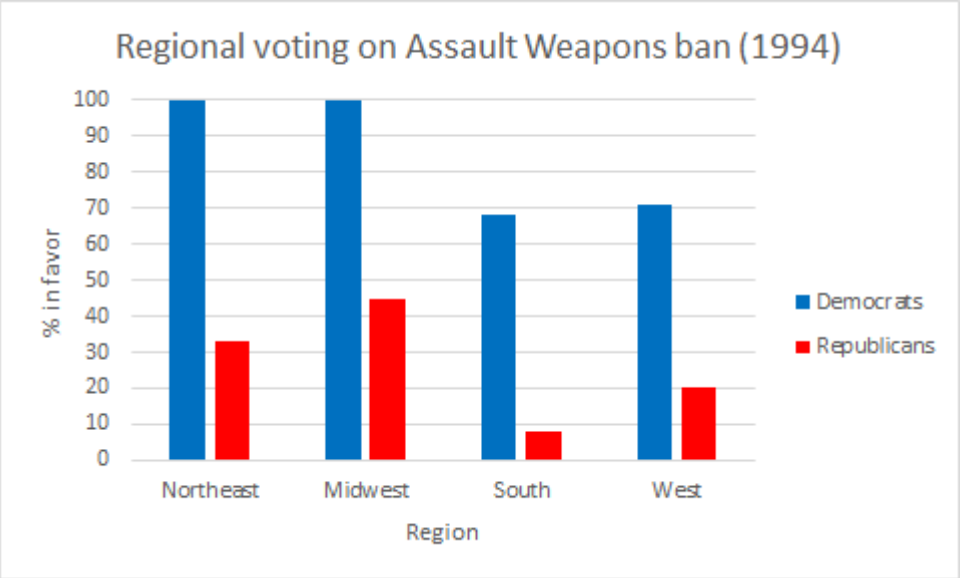
After a decade of dormancy on the issue, the post Sandy Hook gun control votes of April 2013 indicated that the Republican party was united in their opposition to gun

[13] A few days after Sandy Hook, Warner had told a reporter "There's got to be a way to put reasonable restrictions, particularly as we look at assault weapons" (Vozella 2012), while Manchin told the hosts of the television program *Morning Joe*, "I don't know anybody in the sporting or hunting arena that goes out with an assault rifle... these are things that need to be talked about" (Peters 2012).

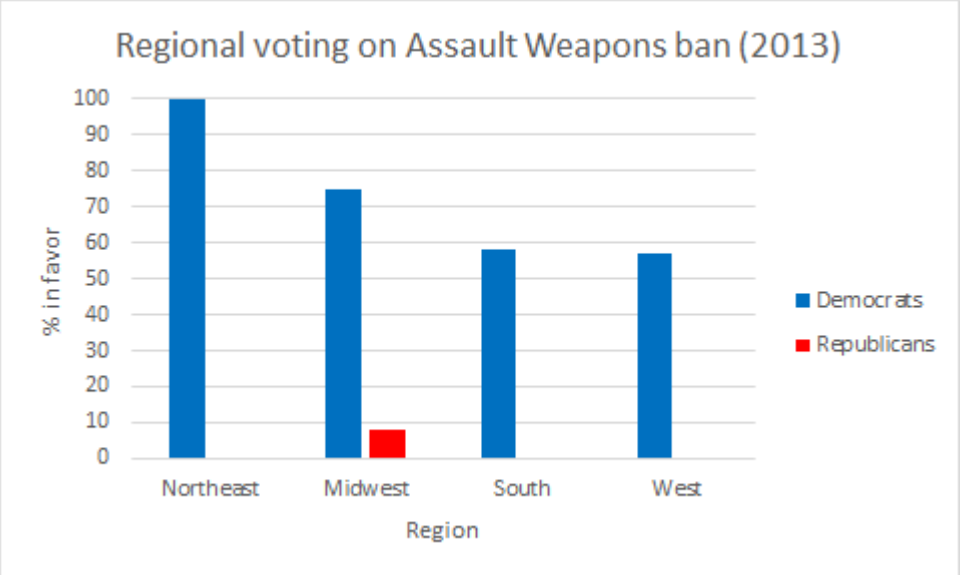
[14] With 52.3 percent of households reporting owning a firearm (Kalesan 2015).

control/support for gun rights, while Democrats remained divided- particularly along regional lines. This partisan disparity in 2013 and the loss of Republican support is evident in the below graphs comparing regional divides in voting on the Assault weapons ban over time (the sole Republican support in 2013 depicted in the Midwest below is Senator Mark Kirk (IL)).

Graph 10: Regional support for the Assault Weapons ban (1994)



Graph 11: Regional support for the Assault Weapons ban (2013)



Part III: The post Orlando Senate votes

Despite their failure to engender the necessary support to pass their renewed gun control agenda in the Senate in 2013, president Obama, the Democratic leadership, and the party majority continued to push for the enactment of new gun controls. In June 2016, the Senate would again find itself debating and voting on gun control in response to a mass shooting, and again, the legislation would fail to pass. Yet this time, there was no significant divide within the Democratic party. This newfound Democratic unity, combined with an already unified Republican party, resulted in the most partisan polarized gun control votes in Congressional history.

The Orlando shooting

On June 12, 2016, a gunman entered the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, killing 49 people and wounding 58 others. It was, up to that point, the deadliest mass shooting in U.S history (Demirjian 2016) (later to be eclipsed by the Las Vegas shooting in October 2017). In a speech from the White House, President Obama issued another call to action, while Senate Minority leader Harry Reid reaffirmed the party's commitment to pursuing gun control, telling reporters he was "heartsick" over Senate inaction and promising that Senate Democrats (who no longer had majority control of the chamber as they did in 2013) would work to force a vote on gun control (Herszenhorn and Lichtblau 2016). Three days later on June 15, Connecticut Senator Chris Murphy would lead the Democratic party's push for gun control by holding a successful filibuster, getting Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell (KY) to agree to hold votes on two gun control proposals- a background checks amendment and an amendment to prevent individuals on terrorist watch lists from purchasing firearms (Alvarez and Perez-Pena 2016).

The Murphy amendment

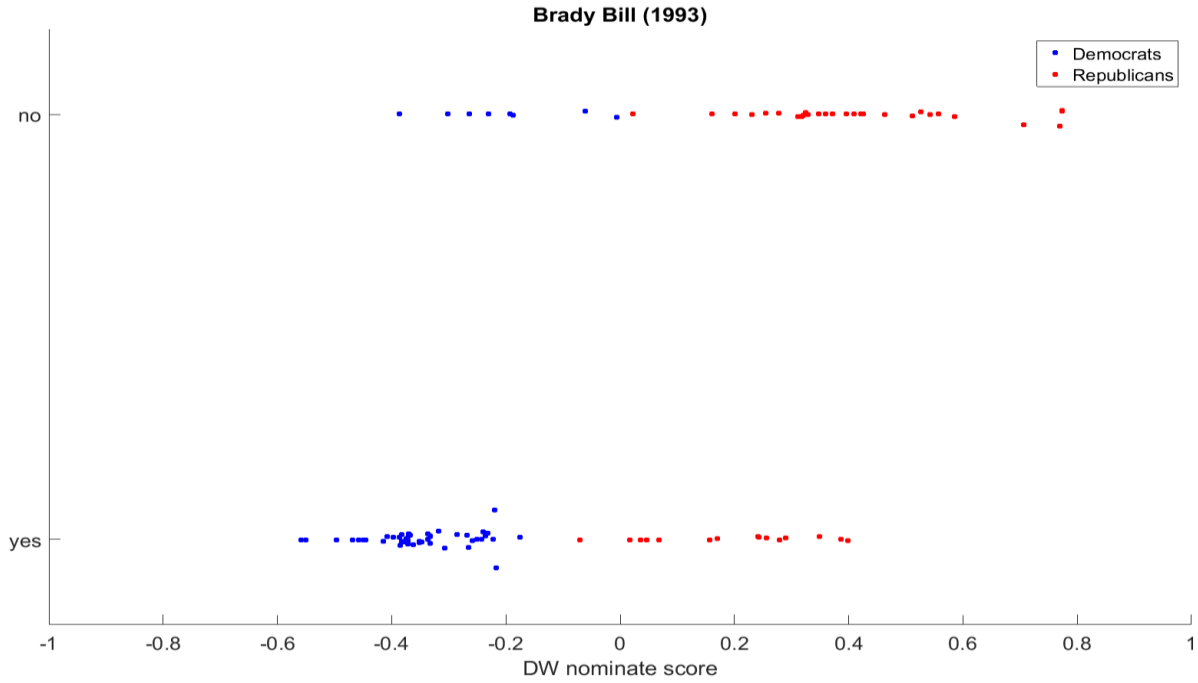
Despite continued evidence of majority bipartisan support amongst the public,[15] the Murphy amendment (which sought to create a system of universal background checks) failed 44-56; it was the most partisan polarized background checks vote in Congressional history.

[15] According to polling conducted by the Pew Research center, 85 of Americans supported a system of universal background checks for gun purchases-a similar percentage to what was reported in 2013 after Sandy Hook. This included 88 percent of self-identified Democrats and 79 percent of self-identified Republicans (Pew 2016).

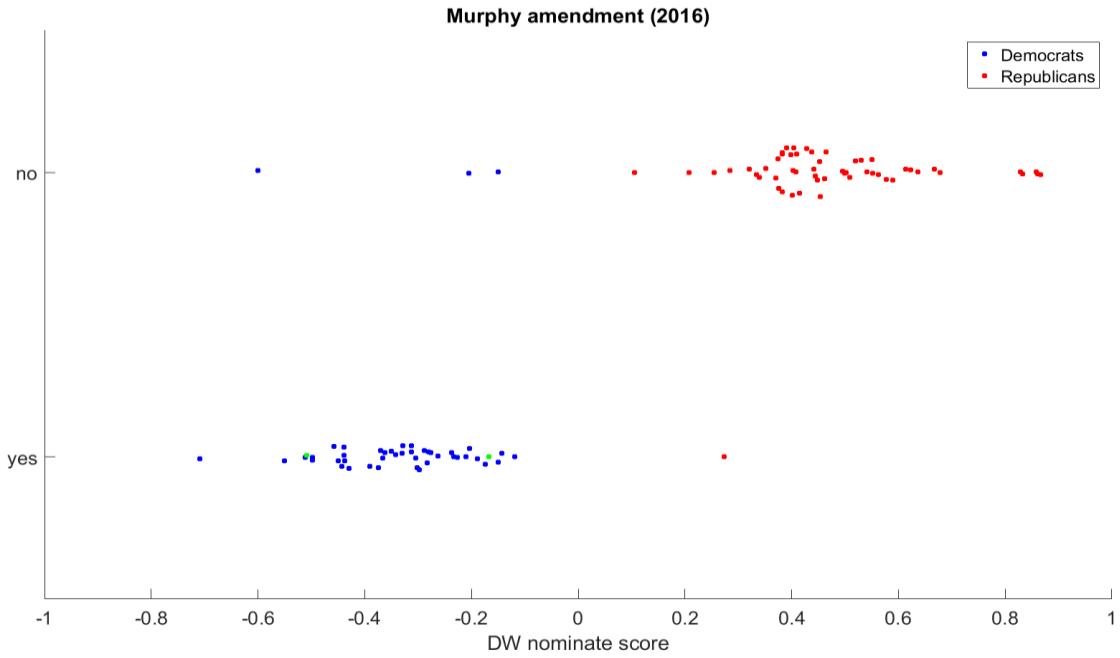
Table 6: Senate background checks legislation (1993-2016)

Legislation	Democrats	Republicans	Independents	Measure of polarization
Brady Bill (1993)	47 yes (85%) 8 no (15%)	16 yes (36%) 28 no (64%)	-	.49
Lautenberg amendment (1999)	44 yes (98%) 1 no (2 %)	6 yes (11%) 49 no (89%)	-	.87
Manchin-Toomey amendment (2013)	49 yes (92%) 4 no (8%)	4 yes (9%) 41 no (91%)	2 yes (100%)	.83
Murphy amendment (2016)	41 yes (93%) 3 no (7%)	1 yes (2%) 53 no (98%)	2 yes (100%)	.91

Graph 12: The Brady bill (1993)



Graph 13: The Murphy Amendment (2016)



The Feinstein terrorist watch list amendment

The Feinstein terrorist watch list amendment (which failed 45-53) would be the most partisan polarized gun control vote in Congressional history. The amendment, which had first been introduced by the Department of Justice during the Bush administration in 2007, (Alvarez and Perez-Pena 2016) sought to grant the Attorney General discretion to prevent firearm sales to an individual on a federal terrorist watch list if there was a reasonable belief that the individual would use the firearm in connection with a terrorist act. Such an amendment was being debated because the Orlando shooter, Omar Mateen, had called the 9-1-1 emergency operating system to profess his allegiance to the terrorist organization ISIS prior to the shooting (Alvarez and Perez-Pena 2016). This made it, according to the FBI, both a mass shooting incident and an incident of terrorism.

This amendment, like a few others discussed throughout the thesis, appears to entwine the gun control issue with another- in this case questions about the right of due process. Yet the debate rhetoric and partisan divides in roll call voting made clear that the fundamental dividing line was a gun control versus gun rights one. Supporters of the amendment contended that it had the potential to prevent individuals like Mateen (who was previously known to the FBI and on a federal terrorist watch list) from committing mass shootings like Orlando- individuals who due to the nature of their activities had forfeited their Constitutional right to bear arms. As Senate Minority leader Harry Reid explained "If you are on a terrorist watch list, you shouldn't be able to buy a gun...there is nothing unconstitutional about keeping a terrorist from buying a gun" (114th Cong. Rec. S8346 (2016)). Opponents argued that because individuals can be placed on these lists without being found guilty of a crime, preventing them from purchasing firearms was a violation of their Second amendment rights. As Senator John Cornyn (TX) argued, "with this amendment the government can take away from you your valuable Second Amendment rights without notice and the opportunity to be heard" (114th Cong. Rec. S8346 (2016)).

Republicans would offer their own terrorist watch list amendment, the Cornyn amendment, which, instead of allowing the Attorney general discretion to prevent a firearm sale, would require federal prosecutors to demonstrate within 72 hours "probable cause" of criminal terrorist activity before preventing an individual on the watch list from buying a firearm (Herzenshorn and Lichtblau 2016). Democrats criticized the amendment as being purely symbolic, arguing that the 72 hour restriction rendered any action functionally

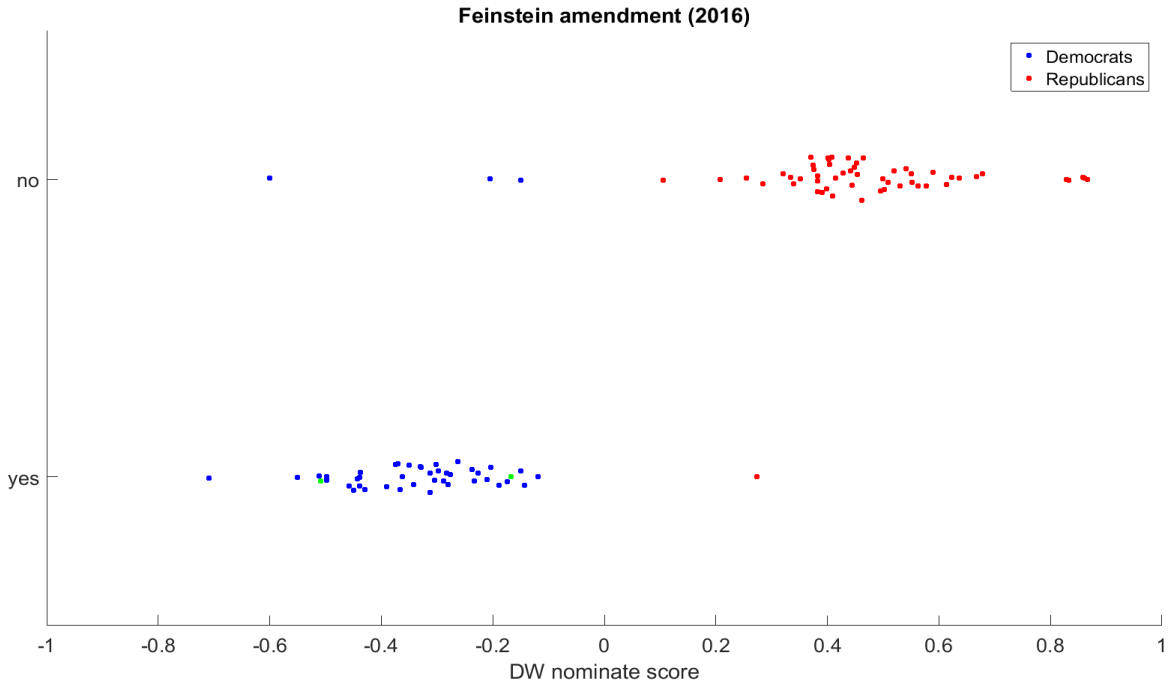
impossible, particularly considering that if the government had probable cause of terrorism the individual would already be in custody (Demirjian 2016). Summing up the opinion of his party, Chuck Schumer (NY), said of the Cornyn amendment "It's a way to say they're doing something when they're doing nothing" (Smith 2016, 1). Yet by offering up an amendment in the first place, it appeared that Republicans were feeling some degree of pressure from the general public to legislate on gun control/terrorism, and there was majority public support for watchlist ban legislation, particularly amongst Republicans.[16] Thus the Republican leadership reverted back to an old party strategy from the post Columbine debates of 1999, introducing a comparatively weaker amendment to provide political cover for the party but which, with the NRA's begrudging acceptance, was unlikely to provide fodder for primary challenge opponents. Both amendments would fail, and both would be significantly polarized, the Feinstein amendment slightly more so.

Table 7: Terrorist watch list amendments

Legislation	Democrats	Republicans	Independents	Measure of polarization
Feinstein amendment (2016)	43 yes (98%) 1 no (2%)	52 no (96%) 2 yes (4%)	2 yes (100%)	.94
Cornyn amendment (2016)	42 no (95%) 2 yes (5%)	51 yes (94%) 3 no (6%)	2 no (100%)	.89

[16] Polling in the aftermath of the Orlando shooting indicated that 88 percent of the public supported banning people on federal terrorist watch lists from buying firearms; this support was even higher amongst Republicans (90 percent support) than Democrats (85 percent support) (Pew 2016).

Graph 14: The Feinstein terrorist watch list amendment (2016)



The post Orlando Senate votes: Analysis

Republican support withdrawn

As the previous section on the post Sandy Hook Senate votes made clear, by 2013 the Republican party was largely united in opposition to gun control/support for gun rights, and particularly in comparison to Democrats, who remained divided over the issue. This Republican unity was further solidified in 2016, when three of the four individuals who had crossed party lines to vote for the Manchin-Toomey amendment in 2013 abandoned their support for background checks.

One such individual was Senator Pat Toomey (PA), a conservative who had been tapped to co-sponsor the Manchin-Toomey bill in 2013. Prior to this Toomey had been a career anti-controller with an 'A' NRA rating; his support for background checks in 2013 earned him the praise of gun control advocates and the 'Champion award' from the non-profit group Sandy Hook promise. It had also earned him the financial backing of the pro-control Independence USA PAC (which was started by businessman and former mayor Michael Bloomberg), which had already spent millions on television advertising in support of his

2016 reelection campaign[17] (Robillard 2016). The other two were Susan Collins of Maine and veteran Arizona Senator John McCain. As representatives of competitive states, these Senators could not completely discount general election voters in favor of the primary electorate. Yet each had faced intense criticism for their 2013 votes, and the electoral pressure for these Republicans to oppose the Murphy amendment in 2016 was significant.

For example, following her 2013 vote, Susan Collins, a moderate Republican who represented the purple, largely rural state of Maine (which is known for its hunting tradition), had been bombarded by attack ads from a group called the National Association for Gun Rights, which had links to Republican Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky. The ads accused her of being complicit in "Obama's gun control schemes" and stated that she wasn't voting "like a Mainer or a Republican" (Ruddy 2013, 1). According to a report from *The New York Times*, during a closed door luncheon for Senate Republicans, Collins gave a speech in which she angrily admonished her colleagues (a speech which appeared to be targeted at Rand Paul, who reportedly left after her remarks) for supporting these gun rights groups, who she argued could put her at risk of losing a primary to an opponent with stronger gun rights credentials who would then be defeated in the general election, ultimately costing the party her seat (Steinhauer and Weisman 2013). And while Collins survived a primary challenge[18] and won reelection in 2014, it was evident from her remarks that primary challenge threats were a major electoral concern for the Senator, who was one of the few remaining Republican political moderates left in the Senate.[19]

While he was not facing any primary challengers in 2016, Senator Pat Toomey, who was up for reelection in the swing state of Pennsylvania, was nonetheless targeted by gun rights groups, who threatened to back his Democratic pro-control challenger Katie McGinty just to send a message to the Senator that his continued support for gun control would not be tolerated. As David Dalton, founder of the northeastern Pennsylvania group American Gun Owners Alliance proclaimed, "If McGinty wins, she will be less powerful as a first-term senator than a second-term Toomey, and it will put the Republican Party on notice that

[17] One ad featured Erica Smegielski, a daughter of the school principal killed at Sandy Hook who praised Toomey, stating "When it came time to vote on background checks, Pat Toomey crossed party lines to do the right thing. That's who he is. And I'm grateful" (Robillard 2016, 2).
[18] Her challenger, political consultant Mike Bennet, had little chance of winning after being publicly disavowed by the party for his past criminal record of domestic violence against his wife (Eichelberger 2014).
[19] Collins had the lowest DW-nominate score amongst Senate Republicans for the 114th Congress (.106).

candidates cannot cross gun-rights activists and win...you finally have to tell Toomey 'enough is enough'"(Levy 2016, 2). Lastly, there was Senator John McCain who, like Toomey, was a conservative (albeit a less predictable one when it came to roll call voting) who was also up for reelection in 2016. McCain was facing four primary challengers (the primary to be held on August 30th, slightly over two months after the Orlando votes), his most competitive being Tea Party member and state Senator Kelli Ward. Ward was a gun rights supporter who had once tried to pass legislation to nullify federal gun laws in Arizona and who had referred to McCain at a gun show campaign event as an "I support the Second Amendment, but…" Senator; (Weingarten 2016, 1) she had also called McCain a "disappointment to conservatives" in a television campaign ad ('Kelli Ward for U.S Senate' campaign ad. Youtube.com). Ward had received the endorsements of the conservative group Club For Growth, the NRA, and other gun rights groups over McCain, and a few weeks prior to the Orlando votes, the 33-year Congressional veteran was leading Ward in primary polling by only 10 percentage points (Roberts 2016).

For their part, Democrats played a role in driving increasing polarization on background checks by making the Murphy amendment slightly stricter than the Manchin-Toomey amendment (by not exempting all person to person firearm sales/transfers from requiring a background check, only allowing family and friend transfers)(Binder 2016). These Senate Republicans had already exposed themselves to electoral risk and primary campaign attacks by supporting background checks; making the legislation stricter opened them up to accusations of falling down a 'slippery slope' of seeking stricter and stricter gun control if they supported it. In an indignant statement after the votes, Senator Pat Toomey blamed Democrats for the failure to engender bipartisanship, remarking that the background checks and terrorist watch list amendments "were designed to maximize partisan differences, and minimize our ability to find the common ground needed to actually make progress and save lives" (Field 2016, 2). However, while making the legislation stricter would only heighten the electoral risk for these Senators, the criticism they faced after their 2013 votes made clear that Republicans who supported Democratic background check amendments were going to face campaign attacks from gun rights groups and primary challengers (particularly during an election year) regardless of the specific contents of the legislation. For by this point, a vote for gun control, no matter the content (even legislation that once passed by unanimous consent like the ammunition clip ban) was considered an abandonment of the Republican party's principles.

Increasing Democratic unity

Over the timeframe that this thesis covers, there have generally been three types of gun control Democrats: blue state representatives who are consistently pro-control, red or high gun ownership state Democrats who are consistently anti-control, and purple state Democrats who are typically swing votes when it comes to the issue, whether or not they support gun control vacillating depending on factors such as the salience of the issue nationally.

By June 2016, one reason there was greater Democratic unity in the Senate on the gun issue than during the 2013 debates was because anti-control Senators Mark Pryor (AR), Mark Begich (AK), and Max Baucus (MT) had left the Senate (Pryor and Begich losing reelection campaigns and Baucus retiring), all three having been replaced by anti-control Republicans. Overall the party lost nine Senate seats in the 2014 elections, including four in the South and six in states that were in the top ten for highest gun ownership levels. With these losses, the party no longer held several seats that had previously been occupied by anti-controllers or gun control moderates/swing votes- this replacement leaving behind a more solidly pro-control Democratic majority in the Senate. In 2016 the only consistently anti-control Democrat remaining was Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota (who was the only Democrat to oppose both of her party's gun control amendments in 2016).

The second key reason for greater Democratic unity was that most of the party's purple/competitive state members had come to swing in support of the party agenda in the years after the post Sandy Hook debates of 2013. This included Senators Mark Warner (VA) and Martin Heinrich (NM), both of whom had entered Congress in 2009 in the midst of the party's abandonment of the issue and who had received 'A' ratings and campaign donations from the NRA for their support for gun rights (Dumain 2017). In 2013, both were among several 'A' NRA rated Senators to vote for gun control for the first time in their Congressional careers by supporting the Manchin-Toomey background checks bill, although they did not fully embrace the party agenda, opposing the Assault weapons ban and voting for the Republican sponsored gun rights amendments. Yet in 2016 Warner and Heinrich would fully commit to the party cause, participating in Senator Murphy's filibuster and voting for both gun control amendments.

And in the years since these 2016 votes, both Heinrich and Warner have continued to distance themselves from their former positions and reaffirm their support for the Democratic gun control agenda. In 2016 Heinrich would announce he had cut ties with the NRA and renounced his membership, defending his decision to do so by stating that "Common sense solutions require an ability to work across the aisle" (Coleman 2016, 1). In 2017, both Heinrich and Warner would publicly abandon their support for concealed carry reciprocity legislation (which Henrich had voted for in 2011 as a member of the House and in 2013 in the Senate, where he was joined by Warner). Asked why he was shifting positions, Heinrich told reporters "I think the approach that's being taken now, especially given the challenges that we have with mass shootings and gun violence in this country, is not the thoughtful way to go about this" (Dumain 2017, 1) while Warner released a statement which read, "With the tragic rate of gun violence today, I simply cannot support efforts to further weaken our nation's gun laws" (Lima 2017, 2). Both also publicly stated in the wake of the Parkland, Florida school shooting in February 2018 that they had come to reconsider their positions on the Assault weapons ban (which they had each opposed in 2013). Heinrich would tell reporters "I intend to support getting rid of assault rifles...I'm fully willing to say I don't need an AR-15. I don't think anybody needs an AR-15 more than we need safety in our schools" (Oxford 2018, 1), while in reference to the ban Warner would state on the television news program *Face the Nation*, "I think it's time for us to change our positions" as "these weaponized, militarized weapons need to be off our streets" (Geiling 2018, 2).

Committing to the party cause

Why were Democrats in competitive states shifting to fully support their party's gun control agenda? I argue because swing vote shifts in favor of gun control within the Democratic party occur as electoral incentives for these representatives change when the gun control issue becomes electorally valuable for the party nationally. As discussed in Chapter Five, party members have an incentive in their party and president succeeding on priority agenda items, as a party's failure to achieve stated legislative goals can make it look weak and ineffective, while legislative successes can have beneficial electoral spillovers for party members across the board (Truman 1959, Lee 2009). Electoral incentive to see one's party succeed would be heightened during an election year, and in 2016 Democrats were hoping to retake control of Congress and retain the presidency.

Additionally, when the gun control issue lay dormant for Congress and the public, there was little electoral incentive for purple state Democrats like Warner and Heinrich to be pro-control. Supporting gun rights was an easy way for Democrats in competitive states to boost their moderate credentials and establish a record of independent position taking that could be used to fend off accusations of partisanship. Yet as public support for stricter gun controls, which had been stagnant for years, continued to increase after Sandy Hook (an increase primarily driven by Democrats in the electorate, as is clear from the graph on page 222), gun control was a potentially electorally valuable, 'winning' issue for the Democratic party again, and supporting it a way for Congressional Democrats to set themselves apart from their Republican colleagues and challengers.

The Democratic party has historically been more united during periods when gun control is an electorally valuable issue for the party nationally; shifts in voting patterns amongst purple state Democrats have occurred at various points over time. For example during the crime concerned decade of the 1990s, 30 House Democrats shifted positions on the Assault weapons ban between 1991 and 1994 (Idelson, 5 May 1994), providing critical numbers to help facilitate the bans passage during the 103rd Congress. During the post Columbine debates of May 1999, a handful of Senators who had opposed the Brady bill in 1993 supported the Lautenberg background check amendment, allowing Vice president (and the presumptive candidate for the 2000 Democratic presidential nomination) Al Gore to cast the tie breaking vote for the amendments passage. During times when the issue has not been viewed as electorally valuable and ceased to be a legislative priority for the party, these swing vote members have swung in the opposite direction, many voting for gun rights during the pro gun rights decade of the 2000s. Most recently, in the years after Sandy Hook as the Democratic party reclaimed the issue and public support for stricter gun controls increased, most of these types of members have swung in favor of the party cause.

As will be discussed in the conclusion chapter, because of this tendency for purple/competitive state Democrats to vacillate on the gun issue, the current state of Democratic unity is not necessarily stable. Even with Senate Democrats being the most united they had been on the gun issue since 1999, there was evidence of this Democratic tenuousness, as Senators Joe Manchin (WV) and Jon Tester (MT) (both of whom faced tough reelection campaigns in 2018 in competitive states that ranked in the top ten for highest gun

ownership levels)[20] abandoned their support for background checks- Manchin, like Republican Senator Pat Toomey, scolding his party for making the Murphy amendment slightly stricter than the background checks amendment he had co-sponsored in 2013 (Kim 2016).

Revitalization of the debate and new gun groups

While the revitalization of the gun control debate after Sandy Hook galvanized gun groups on both sides of the issue (including the two most historically prominent groups up to that point- the NRA and the Brady Campaign), it also saw the advent of two new pro-control groups- Americans for Responsible Solutions and Everytown for Gun Safety. Americans for Responsible Solutions was founded in the weeks after Sandy Hook by Congresswoman Gabby Giffords, who herself was shot at a constituent meet-and-greet in a Tucson, Arizona parking lot in January 2011 (Lacey and Herszenhorn 2011). Everytown was founded in 2014 by former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg, merging two groups- Mayors Against Illegal Guns and Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America (Ho 2016).

What these new pro-control groups have in common with the veteran Brady Campaign is similar policy goals- all three are currently focused on pursuing legislation which they believe has the best chance of passing- a universal system of background checks (Ho 2016). But while they share similar policy goals, these groups differ in other respects- most notably in regard to spending. Since their founding, both Everytown and Americans for Responsible Solutions have far surpassed the Brady Campaign in election year spending. For example in 2014, Everytown spent $1.7 million on lobbying expenditures, compared to the $100,000 spent by the Brady campaign; during this same cycle, the Americans for Responsible Solutions Super PAC spent $8 million on independent expenditures, the Brady Campaign's PAC spending only $46,000 (The Center for Responsive Politics 2017).

In terms of polarization, one might question whether the advent of these new, better funded pro-control groups played a role in driving the Democratic shift in support for gun control that occurred in the years after Sandy Hook. While an intriguing notion, as with the NRA and the Republican shift in the mid-2000s, there is no compelling evidence to suggest

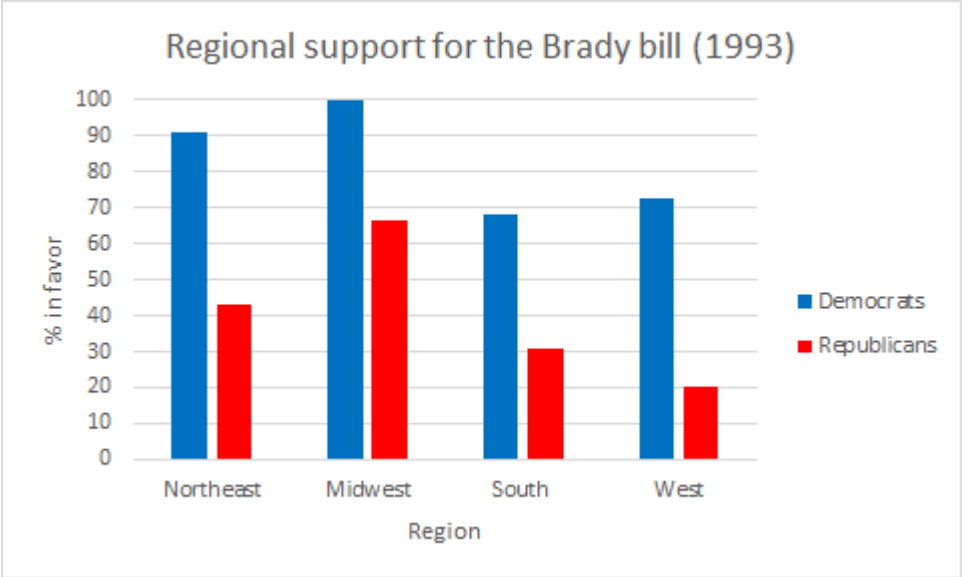
[20] West Virginia was ranked 4th (with 54.2 percent of households reporting owning a gun), and Montana 6th (52.3 percent) in a ranking of the 50 states based on levels of gun ownership (Kalesan 2015).

that this was the case. By the time Americans for Responsible Solutions and Everytown for Gun Safety entered the debate, Congressional Republican support for gun control had long since dissolved, while the NRA had made the strategic decision to cast its lot with the Republican party after it gained control of Congress in 1995. So as these new organizations began to form, their decision as to which party to align with and focus their resources in favor of had already been made for them. Overall, this thesis has argued that gun issue interest groups did not drive increasing partisan polarization on gun control, but rather acted as opportunists, polarizing alongside the parties as they adapted to shifting party dynamics, aligning themselves with and channeled their resources in favor of the parties most capable and willing to help them achieve their policy goals. For the primary goal of these gun issue groups is to effect gun policy, using members of Congress as their instruments to do so.

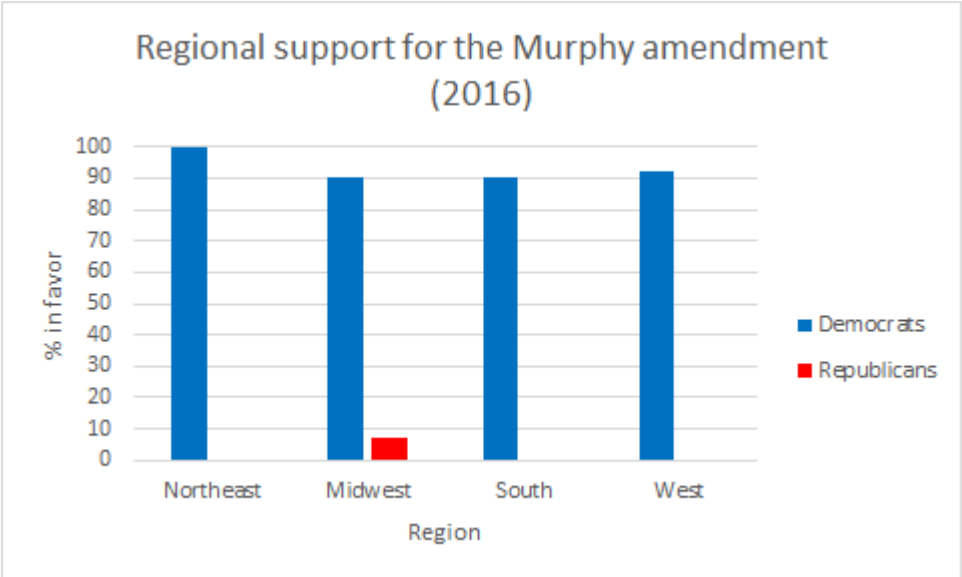
The post Orlando Senate votes: Conclusions

Overall, the 2016 post Orlando Senate votes were a display of party unity on the gun issue. Due to the loss of several red and high gun ownership state Senators and with most of the party's purple state Senators fully committing to the party cause, Senate Democrats were the most united they had been since the post Columbine debates of May 1999. This, combined with the Republican party's unity in opposition to the Democratic agenda (with three Senators withdrawing support for background checks, leaving only Mark Kirk voting in support), resulted in the most partisan polarized gun control votes in Congressional history. For the first time over the timeframe that this study covers, there were no significant regional divides in voting present in either party, as is evident from the graphs comparing background checks legislation below.

Graph 15: Regional support for the Brady bill (1993)



Graph 16: Regional support for the Murphy amendment (2016)



And notably, in 2016 there was significantly less vote splitting (i.e. members voting for one, but not both or neither of the gun control amendments) than in 2013. And while it was the case that the most divisive legislation from the previous debates (the Assault weapons ban) had been taken off the table, trends in party voting over time crucially indicate that gun issue voting has become party voting irrespective of legislative specifics. The examples of Senators Harry Reid and Dan Coats perhaps best illustrate this phenomenon. Despite his 'mostly pro-gun' voting record, Harry Reid (NV) fully committed to his party's

pro-control agenda beginning in 2013, which included voting in favor of the Assault weapons ban- legislation he had previously opposed twice in his Senate career. Similarly, when former pro-controller Dan Coats (IN) returned to the Senate after a decade in the private sector, he did not distance himself from some gun controls, but renounced his pro-control position completely- abandoning support for both background checks and the Assault weapons ban and opposing all gun controls during the 2013 and 2016 debates.

Given the instability of gun control support amongst certain types of Democrats, legislative specifics remain more relevant for Democrats (like Senators Manchin and Tester discussed above) than Republicans, for whom a vote for gun control is a deviation from conservative principles regardless of its contents. Yet the diminishing trend of party vote splitting over time critically indicates that as Congress has become increasingly partisan polarized on the issue, most Democrats are supporting most gun controls as most Republicans are opposing them- a general gun control versus gun rights partisan cleavage characterizing the debate in the present.

In summary, the 2016 Senate votes were a display of party unity, resulting in the most partisan polarized gun control votes in Congressional history. But what can be said of the House, which hasn't debated or voted on gun control legislation in over a decade?

Part IV: Gun rights votes in the House

Due to both the Democratic party's abandonment of the issue in the 2000s and the fact that since recommitting to it (as of the time of this writing) they have not held majority control of this chamber, the House of Representatives has not voted on gun control legislation since 1999. However, in recent years the House has considered gun rights legislation- votes which, like the most recent gun control votes in the Senate, were nearly fully polarized along party lines. On concealed carry reciprocity legislation, two votes were held (in 2011 and 2017), a comparative analysis indicating that by the second vote Democratic support for the legislation had almost completely dissolved. As will be discussed in the following sections, this occurred primarily due to replacement, but also critically as most remaining Democratic supporters shifted positions to vote the party line in 2017. Ultimately, with neither party

retaining what the thesis defines as a minority opposition group,[21] the House gun rights votes of 2017 crucially indicate that the shift towards hyper polarization on the gun issue is not limited to the Senate, but extends to this chamber as well.

Concealed carry reciprocity

Continuing the party's pursuit of a gun rights agenda that had been initiated more than a decade prior, in November of 2011 Republican House Majority leader Eric Cantor (VA-7th) called up the National Right-to-Carry Reciprocity Act for consideration in the House. The legislation would require states that issue concealed carry permits (which at the time was every state except Illinois) to recognize out of state permits, even if the standards and requirements of that state's permit are weaker (Kim 2011). Its proponents argued that a uniform standard was needed so that gun owners could freely exercise their Second amendment rights across state lines, while opponents of the legislation contended that forcing states with strong gun control laws to accept weaker standards was a violation of state's rights as protected by the 10th amendment. The Act passed comfortably 272-154- and while the gun rights issue was entangled with another (the issue of state's rights and the 10th amendment), the divides in voting present were typical for a gun rights vote. Overall, the Republican party (the self-professed party of protecting state's rights[22])(Delkic 2018) overwhelmingly supported the legislation, remaining united in support of gun rights as it had been since the mid-2000s. And while most Democrats opposed it, a minority opposition group within the party remained- 43 Democrats crossing party lines to vote alongside Republicans, the typical regional and district type divides in Democratic support that had existed in gun control/gun rights voting since the 103rd Congress remaining.

The National Right-to-Carry Reciprocity Act of 2011 was not considered by the Senate during that Congress, but it would be taken up again in December 2017, when the House would vote on and pass a virtually identical bill, renamed the Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act of 2017. While there was a slight decrease in Republican support (predominantly amongst Northeastern representatives), the party nonetheless remained united

[21] In this thesis, an opposition group must comprise a minimum 10 percent of the party in the Senate and 15 percent in the House.

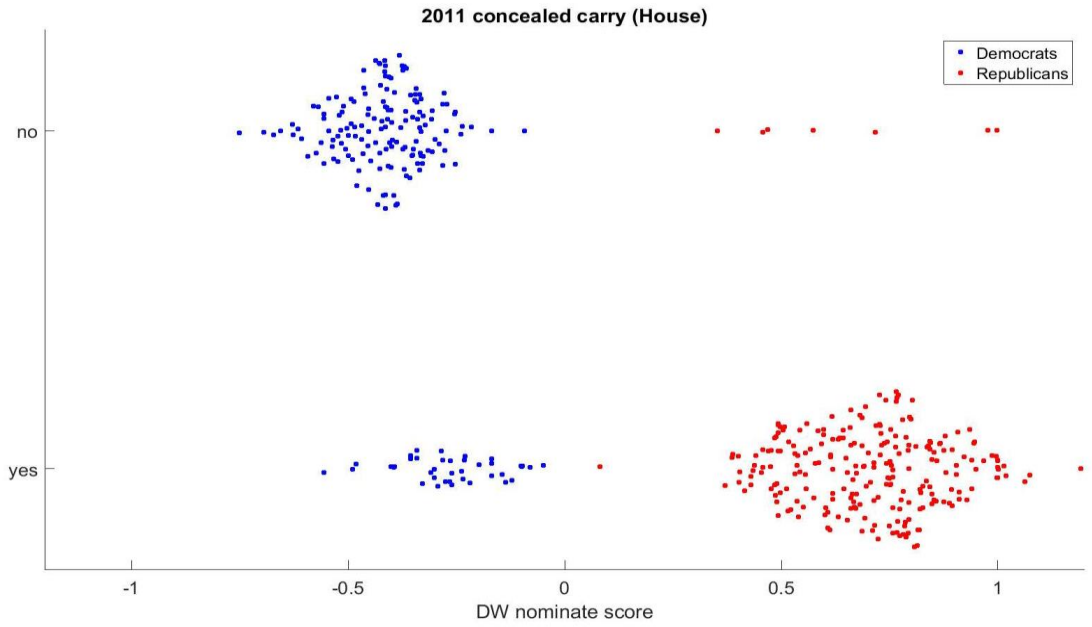
[22] The only Republican representative to voice opposition to the legislation on state's rights grounds was Daniel Lungren (CA-3rd), an anti-controller who nonetheless argued "we ought to understand that States' rights is a legitimate argument here on this floor (112th Cong. Rec. H7668 (2011)).

in support of concealed carry, while the biggest change between votes over time occurred within the Democratic party, as party support for concealed carry largely dissolved between 2011 and 2017 (due to both replacement and members shifting positions). As a result, the concealed carry vote of 2017 was nearly fully partisan polarized, and with the exception of continued support from the few remaining rural Democrats, regional and district type divides in party voting were no longer significant for either party, as is evident in the graphs below.

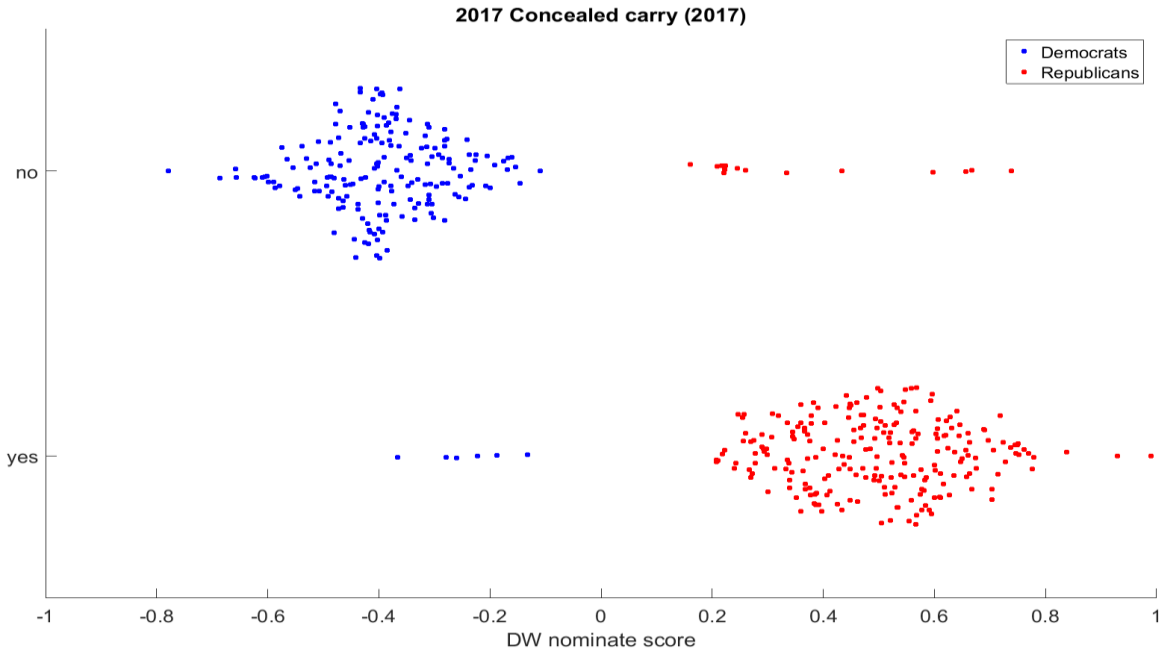
Table 7: House concealed carry legislation

Legislation	Democrats	Republicans	Measure of polarization
Concealed carry (2011)	43 yes (23%) 147 no (77%)	229 yes (97%) 7 no (3%)	.74
Concealed carry (2017)	6 yes (3%) 184 no (97%)	225 yes (94%) 14 no (6%)	.91
Concealed carry (**without vote switchers**)	19 yes (10%) 171 no (90%)	229 yes (93%) 18 no (7%)	.83

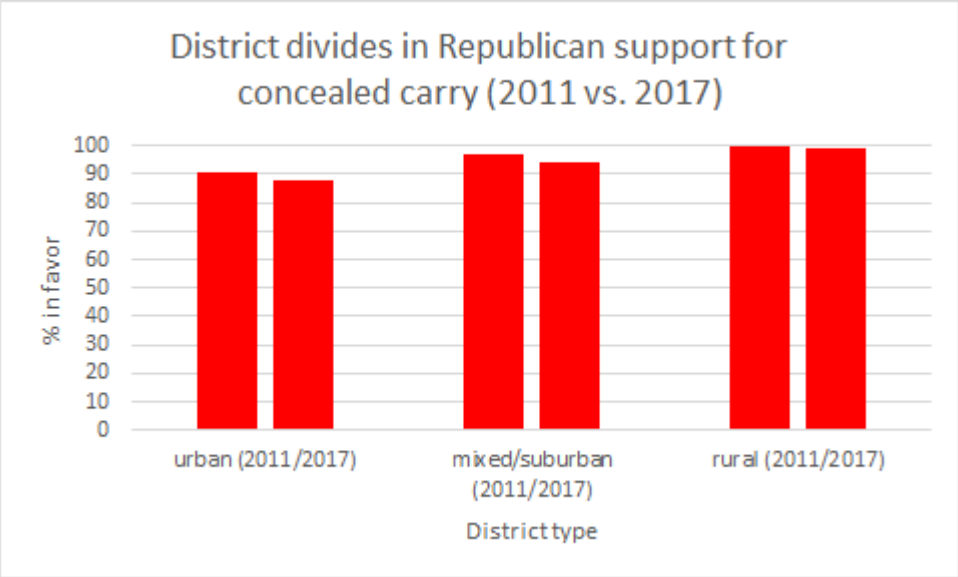
Graph 17: Concealed carry reciprocity (2011)



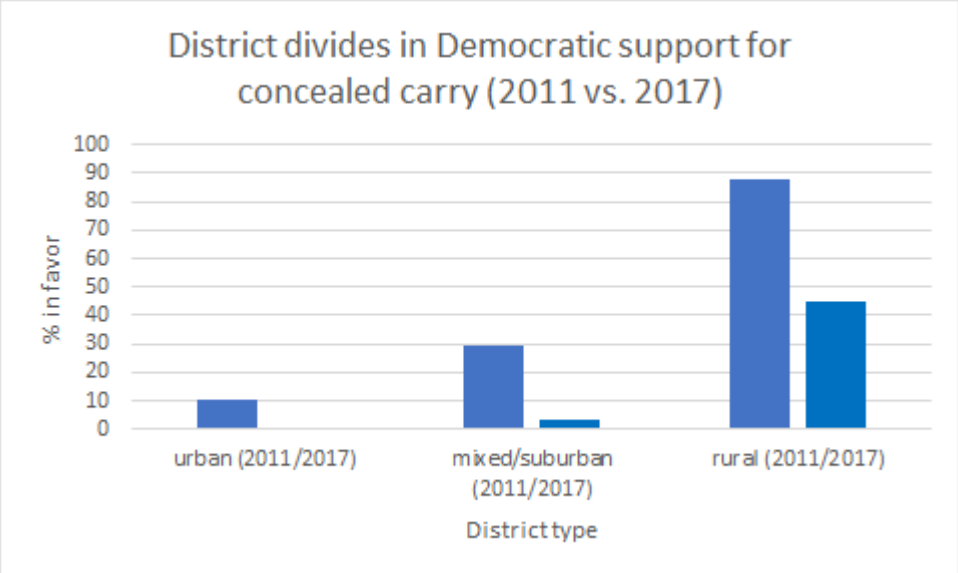
Graph 18: Concealed carry reciprocity (2017)



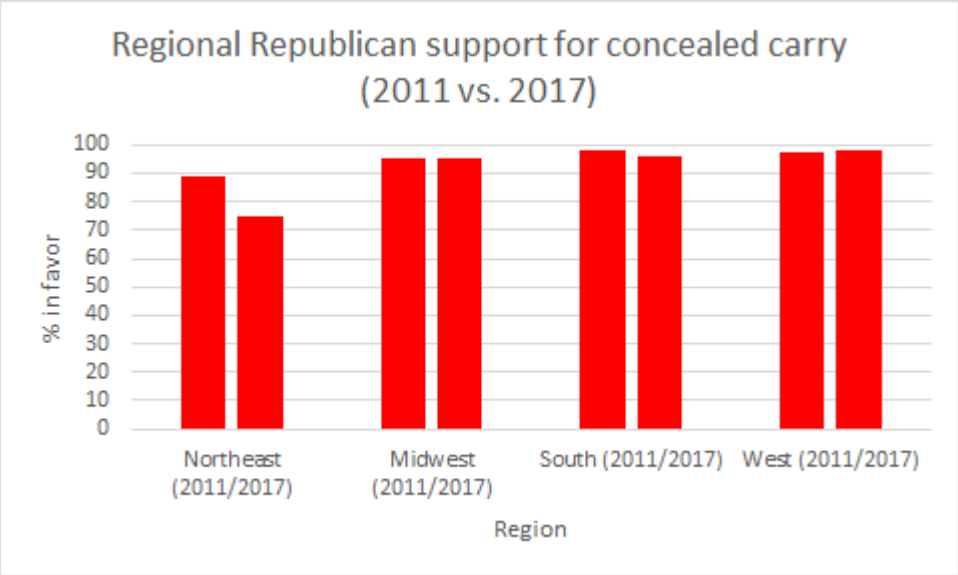
Graph 19: District type divides in Republican support for concealed carry (2011 vs. 2017)



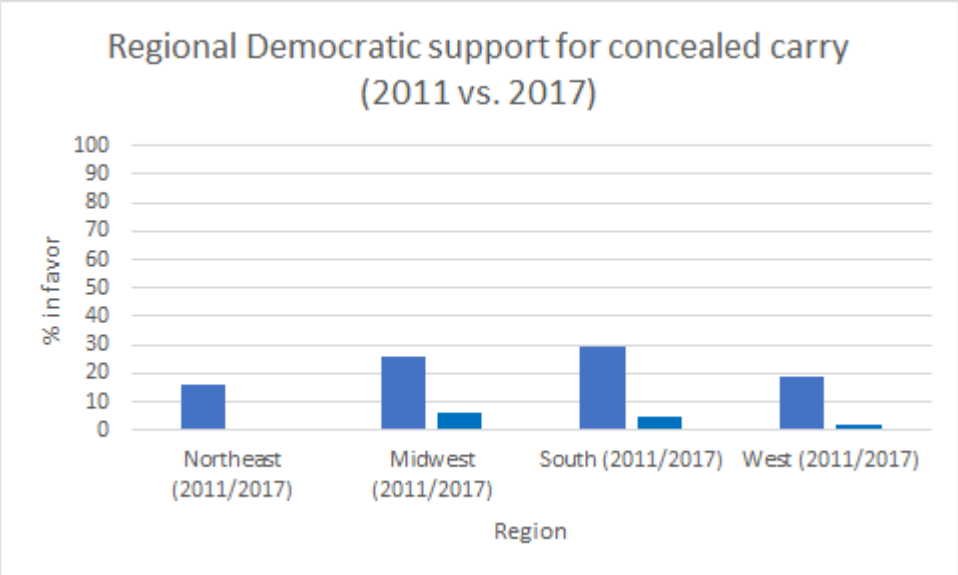
Graph 20: District divides in Democratic support for concealed carry (2011 vs. 2017)



Graph 21: Regional divides in Republican support for concealed carry (2011 vs. 2017)



Graph 22: Regional divides in Democratic support for concealed carry (2011 vs. 2017)



A loss of Democratic support

Between 2011 and 2017, the Democratic minority opposition group in the House that had supported concealed carry would almost completely dissolve, resulting in the latter vote being nearly fully polarized along party lines. What explains this shift? A major contributing factor was replacement- for of the 43 Democrats who voted for concealed carry in 2011, 25 were no longer in the House in 2017, 17 of whom had been replaced by pro-gun rights Republicans. Delving further into this replacement, to what extent might regional and district realignment have played a role? Over this timeframe, the most critical change involved the loss of ten Democratic rural seats, including five in the South- all of which had been held by Democrats who voted for concealed carry. As will be discussed in the conclusion chapter, the Democratic loss of rural districts (which historically have had the lowest levels of Congressional support for gun control by district type) in the House in the decades since the 103rd Congress is a key contributing factor to the declining Democratic support for gun rights over time.

Beyond this rural district loss, there was otherwise not a major change in regional/district composition for Democrats in the House between 2011 and 2017, as is evident in the table below. What did occur, however, was a whittling away of Democratic support for concealed carry across regions and even in the South- which has historically been the region with the highest levels of Democratic support for gun rights. And while one might perhaps question if this decline in Southern support for concealed carry can be explained by Democrats losing all or most of their non majority-minority districts, this was not the case- as the party retained a comparable number of majority-minority districts and majority white districts (with the exception of their rural loss) in the South between 2011 and 2017.[23]

[23] A majority-minority district is a Congressional district in which the majority of the population is non-white; in the South, there are a number of majority Hispanic (mostly in Texas) and majority African-American districts-and historically (although as will be seen, not always) representatives of these districts have tended to be pro-controllers. In 2011 the Democratic party held 13 urban majority-minority districts, 6 mixed/suburban majority-minority districts, and 2 rural such districts; in 2017 they held the same number (13) of urban, 11 mixed/suburban, and 1 rural majority-minority district. In terms of majority white Southern districts, the party held 5 urban, 17 mixed/ suburban, and 5 rural in 2011, and 7 urban, 14 mixed/suburban, and no majority white rural districts in 2017.

Table 8: Regional/district support for concealed carry (2011-2017)

# seats (# voting for concealed carry)	**Northeast**	# seats (# voting for concealed carry)
2011 (112th Congress)	District type	2017 (115th Congress)
23 (0)	urban	19 (0)
29 (7)	mixed/suburban	31 (0)
3 (2)	rural	1 (0)
55 (9) 9 of 55 for concealed carry (**16%**)		51 (0) 0 of 51 for concealed carry (**0**)
	Midwest	
22 (3)	urban	17 (0)
9 (2)	mixed/suburban	12 (0)
4 (4)	rural	4 (2)
9 of 35 for concealed carry (**26%**)		2 of 33 for concealed carry (**6%**)
	South	
18 (3)	urban	18 (0)
23 (5)	mixed/suburban	25 (1)
6 (5)	rural	1 (1)
13 of 47 for concealed carry (**28%**)		2 of 44 for concealed carry (**4%**)
	West	
24 (2)	urban	25 (0)
25 (5)	mixed/suburban	38 (1)
3 (3)	rural	0 (0)
10 of 52 for concealed carry (**19%**)		1 of 62 for concealed carry (**1.5%**)

Abandoning support for concealed carry

Overall, the replacement of 17 pro-gun rights Democrats by pro-gun rights Republicans is relatively straightforward for understanding increasing partisan polarization on the issue. Yet this replacement was not the sole factor contributing to the decline in Democratic support for concealed carry (see table 7), as the majority (13 of 18) of the remaining members who voted for concealed carry in 2011 shifted positions to vote the party line in 2017.

One such individual was Tim Ryan (OH-13th), a suburban representative who had voted for gun rights since entering the House in 2003. Despite his pro-gun rights voting record, the 'A' NRA rated Ryan would come to distance himself from his former position and embrace his party's pro-control agenda, going beyond simply abandoning support for concealed carry in 2017. In the wake of the Las Vegas shooting in October 2017, Ryan announced he would donate the equivalent of the PAC money he had received from the NRA throughout his Congressional career to pro-control groups, a spokesman telling reporters that Ryan "has come to see the NRA as less of an advocate for gun owners and more of an advocate for the gun industry, refusing even the most basic, common sense gun safety reforms" (Eaton 2017, 1). And in 2018 in the aftermath of the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, Ryan helped organize a House sit-in to protest the Republican party's refusal to consider gun control, stating "we are trying to do something to get everybody's attention, to at least get a vote on this stuff" (Steyer 2018, 1).

And Ryan was not the only Democrat to abandon support for concealed carry and vocally express support for the party's renewed pro-control agenda. Urban representatives Terry Sewell (AL-7th), Luis Gutierrez (IL-4th), Ben Ray Lujan (NM-3rd), and Andre Carson (IN-7th) would all come out strongly in support of gun control in the years after their party's recommitment to the issue as a legislative priority. For example, at a town hall meeting in Montgomery, Alabama in January 2013, Sewell, who professed a fondness for deer hunting as a child, told the audience that "In light of the events of Newtown, Aurora and others, I think we should look at sensible, common sense reform. I'm open to that" (Chandler 2013, 2). In a similar vein, Gutierrez would issue a press release in 2013 calling for a renewed gun control effort and stating that "Chicago has been in the center of the debate on gun control, and I am glad that we are finally revisiting this important topic of public safety after horrific

mass shootings like Newtown, CT" (Office of Rep. Luis Gutierrez. Press Release. March 3 2013). In 2016 Ben Ray Lujan, who had previously received campaign contributions from the NRA, told reporters that he had given away this money and severed his relationship with the organization, stating, "The NRA has become out of step with what it means to be a responsible gun owner" (Garcia 2018, 1) while after the Las Vegas shooting that same year, Andre Carson issued a statement that "Now is the time to enact strong legislative measures to curb gun violence. We should reinstate an assault weapons ban" (Daudelin 2017, 1).

Another shifter on concealed carry was mixed/suburban district representative Adam Smith (WA-9th). Smith, who had supported the Republican gun rights agenda during the 2000s and had voted against background checks legislation earlier in his career, publicly reversed his position in 2016, embracing a universal system of background checks and earning the endorsement of the Pride Fund, an LGBTQ gun control PAC created after the Orlando shooting (Hotakainen 2016). After the Orlando shooting, Smith publicly criticized the NRA (who had in 2011 given him a 'B' rating, indicating a mostly pro-gun rights voting record), stating that the organization should do more to support laws "to eliminate the unconscionable and rampant gun violence plaguing our nation" (Hotakainen 2016, 1). Shortly before the 2017 concealed carry vote, Smith issued a press release calling the legislation "a dangerous bill" and stating "With gun violence on the rise in America, the act of Congress injecting more firearms into public spaces, while weakening both state and federal statutes, is irresponsible" (Office of Rep. Adam Smith Press Release. 6 Dec. 2017). In his vehement criticism of the bill, he made no mention of his former support for the exact same legislation in 2011.

As a final example, perhaps the most noteworthy Democrat in the House to shift on concealed carry was Gene Green (TX-29th). Green, whose district comprised the eastern suburbs of the city of Houston, Texas, was a veteran anti-controller who had opposed both the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban during the 103rd Congress, as well as the McCarthy background checks amendment during the post Columbine debates of June 1999. He had also supported each of the Republican sponsored gun rights bills up to the 2011 concealed carry vote. Throughout his career, he had been a vocal proponent of gun rights; in 2011, he had passionately defended his support for concealed carry, stating during floor debate that "I am a proud co-sponsor of the bill. This important legislation reinforces fundamental rights enshrined in the U.S. Constitution...Our country should not force its law-abiding citizens to check in their fundamental right to self-defense at the state line" (112th

Cong. Rec. H7669 (2011)). Yet in 2017 (and notably, a month after announcing he would not seek reelection in 2018), Green would abandon this support, for the first time in his House career joining most of his Democratic colleagues in opposition to gun rights legislation.

Changing electoral incentives

Why did most of the remaining Democrats who voted for concealed carry in 2011 shift positions to vote the party line in 2017? And what explains the whittling away of Democratic support across regions/districts seen in the table above, which also indicates that new Democrats who had entered the House after 2011 were not supporting concealed carry? As discussed in the previous analysis of Democratic unity in the Senate, shifts in Democratic voting patterns on the gun issue occur as electoral incentives for party members change when the issue becomes electorally valuable for the party nationally.

In November of 2011 when the House first voted on concealed carry, the gun control issue had been dormant in Congress for six years- the Democratic party having long since abandoned it as a priority agenda item. Crime had not been a priority political issue for almost a decade and the national violent crime rate was at a 41-year low,[24] while public support for stricter gun controls had waned in recent years, polling after the Tucson shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in January 2011 indicating that a majority of the public (58 percent) viewed mass shootings as "just the isolated acts of troubled individuals" rather than as a "reflection of broader problems in society" (Pew 2011). As discussed previously, numerous Democrats (particularly political moderates and those in competitive districts such as Adam Smith and Tim Ryan discussed above) voted for the Republican gun rights agenda during this decade plus, as voting for gun rights was a way to boost one's moderate credentials and establish a record of independent position taking by crossing the party line. At the time, even some representatives of majority-minority districts voted for gun rights, which was notable considering that historically these representatives (at least non-rural ones) have consistently been pro-controllers. In 2011 there were four (including Terry Sewell (AL-7th), Luis Gutierrez (IL-4th) and Gene Green (TX-29th) discussed above) who voted for concealed carry.

[24] The national violent crime rate in 2011 was 387.1 per 100,000- the lowest rate since 1970, and significantly lower than the peak rate of 758.2 in 1992 (FBI Uniform Crime Reports).

By 2017 however, the political context had changed significantly. The gun control issue no longer lay dormant, as public support for stricter gun controls (driven primarily by Democrats in the electorate) had increased in the years after Sandy Hook, in 2017 reaching its highest level since 2004 (refer to graph 3 on page 203). After a decade with little electoral incentive to support it, gun control was a potentially electorally valuable, winning issue position for Democrats again- and an issue on which they could set themselves apart from their political opponents. After a decade in which they had been encouraged to avoid the issue during campaigns (Hart 2011) Democrats would begin to run on pro-control platforms again in the years after Sandy Hook, even attacking their fellow Democrats in the process, as Gene Green (TX-29th) found when his past voting record was criticized in the 2016 Democratic primary by his opponent, Harris County Sheriff Adrian Garcia. Garcia issued a campaign release listing every anti-control/pro gun rights vote of Green's career and stating "Gene Green is the NRA's favorite Democrat in Congress. He's part of the reason our president has had to use executive action to protect our people" (Hinchcliffe 2016). The veteran Green ultimately defeated Garcia by 18 percentage points (57 percent to 39 percent), but it was his closest primary challenge in over twenty years.[25]

Additionally, the Democratic party's reclaiming of the issue altered electoral incentives for party members in other regards. For example, while it did not matter when the party abandoned the issue (as was evident when Harry Reid retained his position as Senate Minority/Majority leader after voting for the Republican gun rights agenda in the 2000s) with the leadership and party majority galvanized in support of gun control, anti-control/pro-gun rights Democrats in pursuit of leadership roles had a reduced chance of climbing the party ranks if they maintained their former position. Two members who shifted positions on concealed carry had recently pursued leadership roles- Ben Ray Lujan (NM-3rd) had run for the position of Chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee in 2014 (which he won), while Tim Ryan (OH-13th) had launched an unsuccessful bid (and likely an ongoing one) in 2016 to unseat Nancy Pelosi as House Minority leader (Nelson 2017).

As a final point, at the time of the 2017 concealed carry vote, the Republican party had majority control of both chambers and was led by president Donald Trump, whose

[25] In the previous two decades, Green had often gone unchallenged or won his primaries by over 90 percent; his closest primary victory before the 2016 contests was in 1994, when he defeated his challenger by 10 points (45 percent to 55 percent)(Federal Election Commission).

presidency up to that point had only intensified partisan divisiveness in Congress. Republicans being united on the gun issue and in control of Congress and the presidency would only further serve to galvanize swing vote Democrats to rally behind their party's cause.

The last vestige of party opposition: rural representatives

While Democratic support for concealed carry mostly dissolved between 2011 and 2017, the few remaining holdouts (four out of five) were rural representatives. While the electoral incentives for many Democrats had changed since the gun control debate was revitalized, for rural Democrats (and rural representatives generally) there remains little electoral incentive to oppose gun rights. Rural districts continue to have comparatively high gun ownership rates and low levels of support for gun control compared to urban and suburban/mixed districts (Pew 2018), while NRA membership has historically been strongest in rural areas (Gray Davidson 1993). And critically, given these factors rural Democrats are unlikely to be criticized for their pro-gun rights position by either a Democratic primary challenger or a Republican general election opponent. Overall, rural representatives continue to face disproportionate incentive to support gun rights and oppose gun control- the balance as one-sided in the mass shooting era as in the crime concerned one.

Continued Republican unity in the House

Between 2011 and 2017 there was a slight decrease in Republican support for their party's concealed carry legislation (from 97 percent to 94 percent), as 14 Republicans, half of whom were from the Northeast, crossed party lines to oppose it. Of this group there were a few shifters, such as Leonard Lance (NJ-7th), a suburban representative whose district was one of only 23 Republican House districts that went for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election (Salant 2017). Lance's Democratic challenger in the same election cycle ran radio advertisements criticizing his gun control position, and specifically mentioning his 2011 vote for concealed carry, the ad stating "Not only has the congressman, who received an 'A' from the National Rifle Association for his support of gun rights, taken money from the NRA, and blamed gun violence on the entertainment industry, but he supported the Right-to-Carry Reciprocity Act of 2011, which would allow a person who is licensed to carry a concealed firearm in one state to legally bring it…to New Jersey" (Peter Jacob for Congress. Radio Ad. 25 Oct. 2016). And while Lance would ultimately defeat his opponent by 11

percentage points (54 percent to 43 percent) and retain his seat, it was evident that the district was becoming more competitive, as the race was his closest general election contest since his first run in 2008.[26] Another shifter was Patrick Meehan (PA-7th), a suburban representative of a district, like Lance's, that was one of only twenty-three that went for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election. Meehan's gun control position had also been challenged during the 2016 campaign by his Democratic opponent, who released a statement reading "After the Orlando shooting I joined members from across the community in a march on Congressman Meehan's District Office to demand change. When Congressman Meehan was asked, in light of the events in Orlando, if he would support a ban on assault weapons, he responded "No." When in Congress I will fight to keep America's families safe, not with empty gestures like my opponent" (Press Release: Join Mary Ellen Balchunis in the fight to end gun violence. 7 Oct. 2016).

That a few Republicans in competitive districts abandoned support for concealed carry between 2011 and 2017 was noteworthy considering how partisan polarized the House had become. Yet a comparison of the two votes indicates that overall, the Republican party has remained firmly united in support of gun rights, with 94 percent of House Republicans voting in favor of concealed carry in 2017. With the exception of a slight decrease in support amongst Northeastern representatives (refer to graph on page 250) there continue to be no significant regional or district type divides in party voting, a phenomenon that has characterized Republican voting on the gun issue since the mid-2000s. As was true in the Senate, the revitalization of the gun control debate and increasing levels of general public support for stricter gun controls has not been electorally significant enough to bring about the return of a Republican pro-control minority opposition group in the House.

Congressional Review Act Repeal

On March 1 2017, Republican president Donald Trump signed into law a bill that repealed an Obama administration rule that required the Social Security Administration to disclose to the FBI information about individuals receiving disability benefits due to mental illness. The rule was implemented to improve the national instant background check system (NICS) by making it easier for the FBI to flag those with mental illness when doing

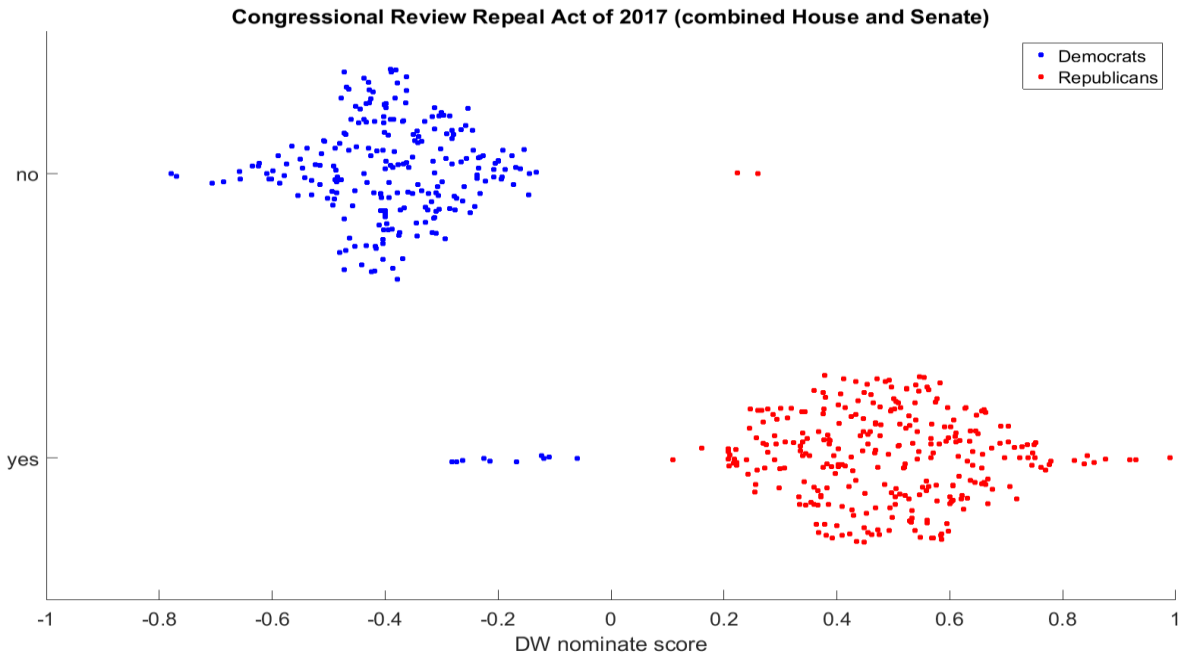
[26] In previous contests, Lance had won the general election by 20 points in 2014, 17 points in 2012, 18 points in 2010, and by 10 points in his first run in 2008 (Federal Election Commission).

background checks for firearm purchases (Lopez 2017). The repeal passed in both chambers, and each vote was nearly fully polarized along party lines- additional evidence that a state of hyper partisan polarization on gun control in Congress had been reached.

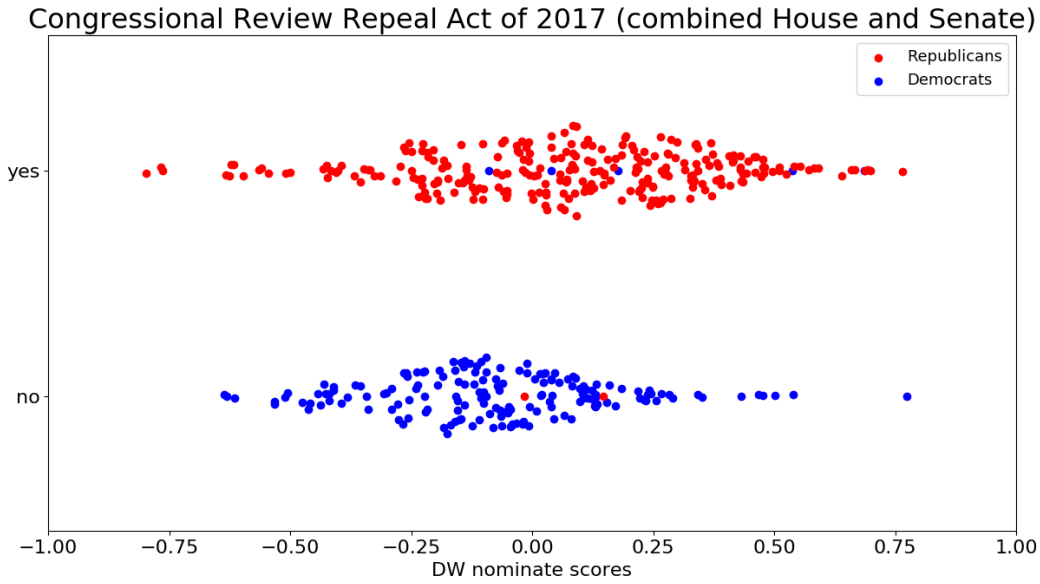
Table 9: Congressional Review Act Repeal (2017)

Chamber	Democrats	Republicans	Independents	Measure of polarization
Senate (passed 57-43)	4 yes (9%) 42 no (91%)	52 yes (100%)	1 yes (50%) 1 no (50%)	.91
House (passed 235-180)	6 yes (3%) 178 no (97%)	229 yes (99%) 2 no (1%)	-	.96

Graph 23: Congressional Review Act repeal (1st dimension DW-nominate)

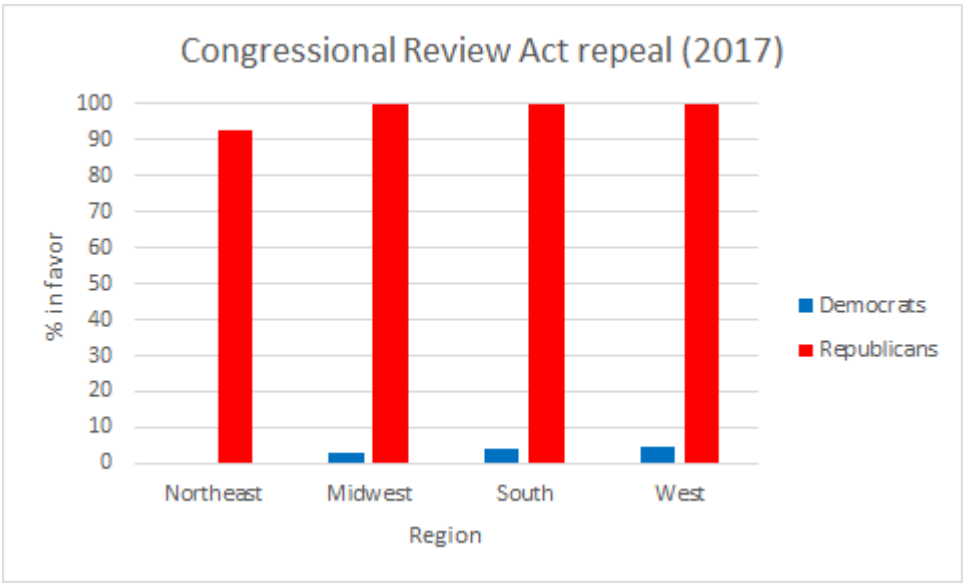


Graph 24: Congressional Review Act repeal (2nd dimension DW-nominate)

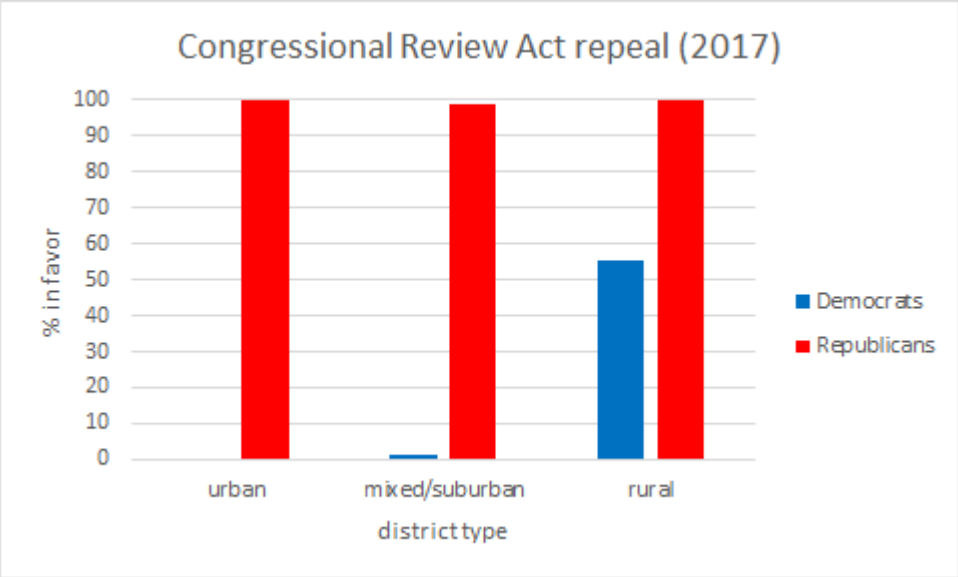


And notably, with the Democratic party united in opposition to gun rights, the second dimension of DW-nominate, which has historically been effective at highlighting inter-party division within the Democratic party on gun voting, was not especially significant for this vote- a noteworthy indication that regional considerations were not a major dividing factor, which is reaffirmed by a lack of regional divides in Democratic voting on the rule repeal.

Graph 24: Regional divides in support for rule repeal



Graph 25: District type divides in support for rule repeal



Chapter Seven: Conclusions

In a 'tipping point' response to the accumulation and increasing frequency of mass shootings in the United States, Democratic party leaders (led by president Barack Obama) reestablished gun control as a legislative priority in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook school shooting in late 2012 after more than a decade of avoiding the issue. While the shift was not immediate, Democratic opposition to gun control would dissolve in the years after Sandy Hook, due to both the replacement of red, high gun ownership state members and the majority of purple/competitive state members swinging in support of the party agenda as gun control came to be viewed as an electorally valuable issue for the Democratic party again.

For most Republicans, the revitalization of the debate and increasing public support for gun control in the years since Sandy Hook has not been electorally significant enough to outweigh other pressures (namely primary challenge threats) which grew increasingly relevant over the timeframe that the issue lay dormant. For most members, primary rather than general election voters have become the more salient voting bloc in regard to the issue, particularly since gun control has not achieved the status of priority political issue[27](and thus

[27] For example in early 2016, Gallup posed the question to voters: "What single issue or challenge are you most interested in having the next president address?" The top five issues were the economy (16 percent), immigration (15 percent), national defense (12 percent), healthcare (11.5 percent), and terrorism (7 percent). Gun control ranked 10th (4 percent) (Gallup 2016).

issue with potential to be decisive in a general election contest- as when its electoral significance was elevated due to its interconnectedness with the crime issue in the 1990s).

Despite their unique polarization trajectories, by the 115th Congress the minority opposition groups within each party had dissolved, culminating in a state of hyper partisan polarization on the gun issue. As of this Congress, most Democrats have come to support most gun controls and most Republicans have come to oppose them; legislative specifics have come to matter less than the general gun control versus gun rights partisan divide in influencing Congressional voting on the issue. Today, a gun vote serves as a signaling device from members of Congress to their partisan supporters that they are either passionate defenders of the Second Amendment (Republicans) or fierce protectors of America's children from gun violence (Democrats). This contention fits with recent work on partisan affect/group identity, as scholars have equated the two party system of today to rival sports teams, contending that the policy positions of the parties and the specific contents of legislation being debated are less important to partisans than siding with their 'team' and opposing the other side (Iyengar 2012, 2014, Miller and Conover 2015). In this regard, since the revitalization of the debate in the years since Sandy Hook, gun control has become one of many issues where, as the parties have become increasingly polarized at the elite level, the party positions have in turn become a part of partisan group identity. This explains why, in contrast to the 103rd Congress, there are no longer any gun control 'outliers' left in Congress today.

Conclusion

As he prepared to cast his votes on gun control in April 2013, Republican Senator Dan Coats faced a dilemma. A former pro-controller, the gun control debate had just been revitalized after a near decade of dormancy, with public opinion in support of stricter gun controls, which had long been stagnant, increasing in the wake of the Sandy Hook shooting. As a representative of a competitive state (Indiana went for Obama (D) in 2008 and Romney (R) in 2012, and his co-Senator at the time was Democrat Joe Donnelly), Coats could not ignore pressure to support gun control from Democratic, Independent, and undecided voters. Yet three years earlier, he had been subjected to intense criticism over his pro-control voting record during the 2010 Republican primary, one opponent chastising his support for the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban in a television ad, another using this record to publicly question his conservative credentials on a television news program. Coats had even run his own television ads in the lead up to the primary to counter these attacks, stating that he had "stood up for the Second Amendment" ('Coats for Indiana' Senate ad. 13 April 2010. YouTube.com) without elaborating on exactly how he had done so.

And while he had managed to win (by ten percentage points) this Republican primary in 2010, two years later Coats would witness his veteran Indiana colleague, Senator Richard Lugar, lose his 2012 primary to a Tea Party challenger (Nichols 2012). Lugar had been a gun control supporter before voting for the Republican gun liability bill in 2005 and other gun rights amendments during that decade; his shift in support for gun rights did not win him the support of the NRA, who endorsed his primary opponent and attacked his former pro-control voting record nonetheless (Kabaservice 2012). The similarities between Coats and his former colleague (both conservative (by the standards of the pre-Tea Party era) Republican Senators from Indiana with pro-control voting records) were unlikely to be lost on him. Overall, while he faced greater electoral pressure to support gun control in 2013 than his red state colleagues, that which he faced to oppose it to be a "conservative in good standing" (Grossman and Hopkins 2016, 114) and fend off potential primary challengers was significant. A question loomed over the Republican Senator and others in similar circumstances: in the post Sandy Hook era, was there enough electoral incentive for Republicans to be pro-control?

On the opposite side of the aisle was Democratic Senator Mark Warner of Virginia, who similarly faced a complex set of circumstances. Another representative of a competitive

state,[1] Warner had entered the Senate when his party had long since abandoned gun control as a legislative priority. Like many other politically moderate, purple state Democrats during that decade, Warner became a gun rights supporter, receiving campaign contributions and earning an 'A' rating from the NRA for his pro-gun voting record. Yet in the aftermath of Sandy Hook, with a shift in public opinion indicative of a galvanized electorate, it appeared that gun control was a potentially electorally valuable issue for the Democratic party nationally again. As with his colleague Dan Coats, Warner faced a decision: should he respond to this public opinion shift and fully embrace his party's gun control agenda, or should he maintain the pro-gun rights position he had held since entering Congress?

Ultimately, both Coats and Warner would shift positions on the gun control issue to vote the party line- Coats doing so fully in 2013 (abandoning his previous support for background checks and a ban on assault weapons), while it took Warner until 2016 to fully embrace all aspects of his party's pro-control agenda. Their shifts, along with many others discussed throughout the thesis, provide compelling evidence that the electoral pressures and incentives influencing opposition group voting in both parties have changed over time. These electoral changes, combined with other factors (such as regional/district realignment) have culminated in a state of unity within each party- unity which translated into near complete partisan polarization on the gun issue by the 115th Congress.

This chapter will conclude the thesis by first summarizing each party's unique polarization trajectory from the 103rd (1993-1994) to the 115th (2017-2018) Congresses, highlighting the key changes which brought about the dissolution of opposition groups within each party. Following this, Part II will unpack and summarize the most critical differences between the party shifts, while also assessing the implications of these partisan asymmetries for polarization stability. Part III will discuss how the thesis's findings contribute to the wider literature (and particularly to the general polarization and gun control literatures), while Part IV will discuss avenues for future research. Part V will end the thesis with some concluding remarks.

[1] With both an enclave of liberal leaning, wealthy Washington, D.C. suburbs and large swaths of conservative rural areas, Virginia has consistently been a swing state, particularly in Senate contests and for the presidency.

Part I: Summary of polarization trajectories

To briefly summarize the thesis's findings, the shift from moderate levels to hyper partisan polarization on gun control in the decades since the 103rd Congress was the culmination of the dissolution of opposition groups within each party- each following its own unique polarization trajectory, which will be briefly outlined below.

The Republican shift

- For the Republican party, the dissolution of party support for gun control was precipitated by the declining salience of crime as a priority political issue in the early 2000s. The crime issue, which had come to dominate public discourse and shape Congressional debate, had elevated the electoral significance of gun control for certain Republicans (particularly urban and suburban adjacent to urban representatives, as well as Senators in states with large urban areas).

- As crime rates began to decline and crime was replaced by terrorism as the top issue concerning the public in the years following the September 11th terrorist attacks, the Congressional Republican leadership took advantage of a window of political opportunity to begin agenda setting on gun rights. With the crime/gun control issues on the political backburner and the electoral pressure to support gun control to be 'tough on crime' having faded, it gave other incentives more weight in influencing opposition group member voting on the issue. This led to a period of transition, as the party united in support of a gun rights agenda in the mid-2000s. Overall, the decline of crime critically influenced when the leadership began their gun rights pursuit, and how opposition group members responded to this pursuit.

- When the gun control debate was revitalized after a near decade of dormancy in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook shooting in late 2012, a comparable minority opposition group to what had once existed did not reemerge within the party. For overall, significant changes in the electoral incentives of Republicans had occurred over the timeframe that the issue lay dormant politically. Not only had Republican voter support for gun control declined over time due to sorting, but with gun control no longer connected to a priority political/general election issue (as it previously was with crime) the primary electorate (who tend to support the most conservative candidates) had come to supersede the general as the more electorally salient voting

bloc influencing Republican voting on the gun issue. As a result, despite the resurrection of the gun control debate in Congress, the party remained similarly united in opposition to gun control/support for gun rights as it had been since the mid-2000s.

The Democratic shift

- While the dissolution of Republican support for gun control occurred in a linear fashion, the Democratic party's polarization trajectory did not follow such a pattern. Despite electoral pressure to support gun control during the 'tough on crime' decade of the 1990s, the Democratic party nonetheless contained a sizable opposition group of anti-controllers- the group heavily comprised of Southern and rural representatives.

- Overall, the declining electoral relevance of the crime issue critically impacted how both parties dealt with gun control in the subsequent decade. While the Republican leadership took advantage of a window of political opportunity to begin agenda setting on gun rights, the Democratic leadership chose to abandon the issue as a legislative priority- having determined after the 2000 presidential and Congressional elections that it was no longer an electorally valuable, 'winning' issue. As a result, in addition to the party's veteran anti-controllers, purple/competitive state representatives were encouraged to 'vote their districts,' many coming to vote for the Republican gun rights agenda over this timeframe. Thus the Democratic party's minority opposition group would grow as its Republican counterpart dissolved in the mid-2000s.

- The party would avoid the gun control issue for over a decade until late 2012- when, with the increasing frequency of mass shooting incidents reaching a tipping point, president Barack Obama and the Congressional leadership reclaimed the issue as a legislative priority. While the shift was not immediate, as the party pursued a gun control agenda in the following years its anti-control minority opposition group dissolved. This occurred due to replacement (namely of red, high gun ownership state, and rural Democrats), but also critically as most of the party's purple/competitive state members (many of whom had voted for gun rights during the previous decade) swung in the opposite direction, fully committing to the pro-control cause as gun control came to be viewed as electorally valuable for the party again nationally. With the Republican party having long since shifted in favor of gun rights, this subsequent

Democratic shift in support of gun control would result in the most partisan polarized gun control and gun rights votes in Congressional history.

Part II: Partisan asymmetries and polarization stability

With only a handful of individuals in each party crossing the party line in their gun voting during the 115th Congress (2017-2018), both parties are as of this Congress united- the Democratic party in support for gun control and the Republican party in opposition to it. And while both contributed to this outcome of hyper polarization, the parties took different paths to arrive there. In concluding the thesis, it is worth taking stock of the key partisan asymmetries related to gun control polarization. What were the most critical differences between the Democratic and Republican shifts, and how best to understand them in the present? And lastly, given the unique nature of each party's polarization trajectory and the different electoral pressures and incentives party members face today, what implications might this partisan asymmetry have for polarization stability?

Partisan asymmetry 1: The role of crime

The first key partisan asymmetry involves the influence of the decline of crime on the party shifts. This thesis has argued that its decline as a priority political issue in the early 2000s played a critical role in precipitating the Republican shift, as it crucially influenced both when Republican leaders began their gun rights pursuit and how opposition group members responded to this pursuit. For with the decline of crime weakening the electoral significance of gun control, it gave other incentives more weight in influencing gun issue voting. For Democrats, it was not a major factor in their shift in the opposite direction; the decline of crime actually brought the parties closer together on the gun issue, as support for gun rights in both increased during the 2000s. While the salience of crime was crucial for engendering bipartisanship on the issue in the 1990s and seeing the Brady bill and Assault weapons ban signed into law, its decline can only be credited with contributing to the Republican party's shift.

A note on crime

While the significance of crime and its relationship to gun control has featured prominently in the thesis and its decline has been identified as the key variable which triggered the dissolution of Republican support for gun control long before the primary electorate became the more salient voting bloc that it is today, it is important to recognize that

despite its importance, crime is one variable amongst several in a dynamic process of change. The thesis has argued that by weakening the electoral significance of gun control, the decline of crime opened the door for other electoral pressures and incentives to carry more weight-pressures and incentives (such as relating to primary challenge threats) which only became more significant during the years that the gun control issue was dormant politically. Given the extent to which this primary pressure became increasingly significant over time, what is to say it would not have eventually superseded pressure for Republicans to support gun control even if the salience of crime had not faded? Yet if crime had not faded and the Republican party had not shifted in favor of gun rights in the mid-2000s, wouldn't it be the case that Republican voters would not have sorted as they have? Ultimately, while the thesis contends that the decline of crime was critical for the timing of the Republican leadership's gun rights pursuit and for how opposition group members responded to this pursuit, it is important to recognize that this electoral change, however significant, did not occur in a vacuum; it should not be considered the sole, isolated factor responsible for the Republican polarization that exists in the present. Rather, it is a key variable which critically created room for other variables to gain and maintain electoral significance in influencing Republican voting on gun control over time.

Partisan asymmetry 2: The primary electorate

Another critical difference between the party shifts involves the asymmetric degree of electoral pressure placed on party incumbents at the primary level. While such pressure is key to understanding the lack of Republican support for gun control today, it is not a relevant factor impacting the Democratic party's unity in support of it.

Republicans and the primary electorate

As discussed throughout the thesis, primary challenges have been an electoral concern for Republicans since the 1980s, when, as the party's conservative identity began to form during the Reagan presidency, moderates began to face accusations that they were not "real Republicans" during primary campaigns (Freeman 1986, 350). Meanwhile, after the National Rifle Association shifted from a sports shooting to a political lobbying organization in the late 1970s, the group became involved in primary election contests, endorsing the opponents of and campaigning against pro-control incumbents in Congress (Gray Davidson 1993). Yet despite this primary pressure, there were nonetheless many Republicans (including

conservatives) who voted for gun control during the crime concerned decade of the 1990s, including individuals such as Senator Mark Warner (VA) and representative Herbert Bateman (VA-1st) who stood by their pro-control position after being attacked for it by a primary opponent.[2] For these Republicans, the general electorate was the more salient voting bloc when it came to influencing their gun control voting.

Yet change would come during the 2000s, as, coinciding with the fading electoral significance of the crime and gun control issues, conservative groups such as the Club for Growth, FreedomWorks, and Heritage Action began increasingly involving themselves in Republican primary campaigns, endorsing and funding challengers with the aim of ousting moderate and "not conservative enough" Republican incumbents. This led to a period of transition for the Republican party, as, with the burgeoning threat of primary challenges and little electoral incentive to support gun control anymore, most opposition group Republicans shifted in favor of gun rights. Over time, and particularly in the years since the Tea Party movement rose to prominence in 2010, Republican incumbents have come to face significant pressure to establish themselves as "conservatives in good standing" (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016, 114) in order to win primaries (Republican primary voters tending to support the most conservative candidates) and fend off primary challengers. The high profile primary defeats of veteran Republican Senators Lisa Murkowski (AK) in 2010 and Richard Lugar (IN) in 2012, as well as the defeat of House Majority Leader Eric Cantor in 2014 (all by Tea Party challengers), have made the electoral significance of primary challenge threats all the more tangible.[3]

And despite the revitalization of the gun control debate in the years since Sandy Hook, increasing public pressure to support gun control has not been significant enough to outweigh the high degree of electoral pressure placed on most Republicans by the primary system to oppose it. For most Congressional Republicans today, the primary over the general has become the more electorally salient voting bloc when it comes to influencing gun issue

[2] For a discussion of these challenges refer to page 160.

[3] In 2010 Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska lost the Republican primary to Tea Party backed candidate Joe Miller by less than two percentage points; despite this, she staged a notable comeback, entering the general election as a write-in candidate and winning reelection (Travis 2010). Two years later, 36-year veteran Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana would lose the Republican primary by nearly 20 percentage points to his Tea Party endorsed challenger Richard Mourdock (Nichols 2012). In perhaps the most surprising defeat of the three, House Majority leader Eric Cantor lost the 2014 Republican primary for Virginia's 7th district by 11 percentage points to Tea Party challenger and Economics professor Dave Brat (Sherman 2014).

voting- particularly since Republican voter support for gun control has declined significantly in the decades since the 103rd Congress due to sorting. And critically, despite the resurrection of the debate, gun control has not achieved the status of priority political[4]/ general election issue- in contrast to the previous era, when its electoral significance was elevated due to its interconnectedness with the crime issue.

Even for competitive state Republicans who cannot ignore Democratic, Independent, and undecided voters, the likelihood that voting for gun control could hurt them in a primary contest (where any vote for gun control will be criticized by opponents as a deviation from conservative principles and where primary voters tend to support the most conservative candidates) is greater than the likelihood that opposing it would prove costly in the general election (where, as a non priority political issue, it is unlikely to play a decisive role in their reelection prospects). This heightened electoral risk in terms of the primary over the general electorate also explains why red state Republicans will not support proposals that have majority Republican voter support like a universal system of background checks or terrorist watch list bans. Primary voters might punish them for supporting these proposals, while Republican general election voters would not be so absolutist (and this not even accounting for the discrepancy between Republican voter support for specific proposals and general support for 'gun control'- the latter having declined significantly since the party shifted in favor of gun rights in the mid-2000s).

Democrats: No comparable pressure

In contrast to the Republican party, primary electoral pressure did not play a significant role in the dissolution of Democratic opposition to gun control. Only one of the Congressional Democrats who shifted positions on gun control in the years after Sandy Hook faced a primary challenger who criticized their anti-control voting record (House rep. Gene Green (TX-29th), who was discussed in Chapter Seven and who won his primary); overall, primary challenges have not been a major electoral concern for Democrats generally. Why is this the case?

[4] According to Gallup's yearly 'most important problem' question, in 2017 dissatisfaction with government ranked first (20 percent), healthcare second (10 percent), racism/race relations third (8 percent), and immigration and the economy tied for fourth (7 percent) as the most important issues facing the country. Guns/gun control tied for the 18th spot (sharing it with poverty, the income gap, the situation in Iraq, the media, and taxes (all at 2 percent). ('Americans view government as nation's top problem in 2017' Gallup. 18 Dec. 2017).

Grossman and Hopkins (2016) argue that the primary electorate is not a concern for Congressional Democrats because "no remotely comparable mechanism of ideological enforcement exists in Democratic party primaries" (238). With no liberal Democratic party equivalent to the Tea Party or commensurate network of liberal groups endorsing and funding primary challenges to oust moderate Democrats, primary challenge threats are not an issue of electoral concern for incumbent Democrats to the same degree that they are for Republicans. While there have been cases of Democrats losing primaries to more liberal challengers, (Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman losing his 2006 primary to challenger Ned Lamont, (Bash 2006) and more recently Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez defeating veteran Joe Crowley in the primary for New York's 14th House district[5] (Murphy 2018)) overall moderate Democrats (and particularly those in competitive states) are rarely punished by primary voters for not being 'liberals in good standing.'

The extent of this partisan primary pressure asymmetry is evident when comparing the political and electoral circumstances of two purple state Senators who consistently opposed gun control after the revitalization of the debate in late 2012- Republican Senator Dan Coats (IN) and Democratic Senator Heidi Heitkamp (ND). As discussed earlier in this chapter, while as a representative of a competitive state Coats could not ignore gun control supporters in the general voting electorate, he had previously faced a barrage of attacks over his former pro-control record in a closely contested primary, while also seeing his Indiana Senate colleague and former pro-controller Richard Lugar succumb to a primary defeat in 2012. Meanwhile, for Senator Heidi Heitkamp, pressure to vote the party line to fend off primary challengers was a virtually non-existent electoral concern. This was the case not only because moderate Democrats in competitive states[6] are rarely punished by primary voters for not being 'liberal enough' in their voting, but also because Heitkamp represented a largely rural state that ranked in the top ten for highest gun ownership levels in the nation.[7] Given her

[5] Like Republican Lisa Murkowski (AK) in 2010, Lieberman won reelection to the Senate despite losing the Democratic primary by running and winning as a third party candidate. Ocasio-Cortez, a former campaign organizer for Senator and 2016 presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, ran on a Democratic socialist platform and won in what was termed by Mother Jones as the Democratic party's "Eric Cantor moment" (Murphy 2018). It is worth noting that both primary upsets were in solidly blue states/districts.

[6] While North Dakota had gone for Republicans in the previous two presidential contests in 2008 and 2012, it was a state which also had a history of being represented by moderate Democrats in the Senate. Prior to Heitkamp and her co-Senator in 2013 (Republican John Hoeven), the previous two Senators, Kent Conrad and Byron Dorgan, had been Democrats who held both Senate seats for nearly two decades.

[7] In a 2015 study of gun ownership levels by state, North Dakota ranked ninth (with 47.9 percent of households reporting owning a firearm) out of the 50 states (Kalesan 2015).

political circumstances, Heitkamp would be far more concerned about how her gun control position may impact the next general election rather than the Democratic primary.

Both Coats and Heitkamp would oppose the Senate gun controls of 2013 and 2016 and support the gun rights vote of 2017- Coats voting the party line and Heitkamp crossing it. And while their electoral concerns and voting decisions were undoubtedly complex, what is particularly evident is that the electoral pressure each faced to vote the party line to fend off primary challenge threats was not comparable.

Partisan primary asymmetry and polarization stability

Overall, electoral pressure related to the primary system is a key factor influencing Republican unity on the gun issue today, while such pressure is not relevant to the current state of Democratic unity. What implications might this asymmetry have for polarization stability?

The voting patterns of Democrats and Republicans in competitive states/districts are critical for influencing polarization levels, as most blue state Democrats remained pro-controllers even when the issue lay dormant and most red state Republicans remained anti-controllers even during the crime concerned decade of the 1990s. Today, due to the significant pressure on party incumbents at the primary level, competitive state Republicans have a solid partisan pressure mechanism encouraging them to vote the party line. Meanwhile, competitive state Democrats do not- allowing them a greater degree of freedom to vacillate depending on their individual political and electoral circumstances at a given time. Since the resurrection of the gun control debate in late 2012, most competitive state Democrats have come to swing in support of the party cause. Yet lacking a partisan pressure mechanism, their support hinges on whether the issue is electorally valuable for the party nationally- the vacillating of these types of Democrats evident at various points throughout the thesis (for examples refer to page 241). Given these considerations, this partisan primary pressure asymmetry suggests that the Republican unity present in Congress today is more stable than that of the Democratic party.

Partisan asymmetry 3: Regional and district realignment

This thesis has demonstrated that both regional and district realignment have contributed to the shift towards hyper partisan polarization on gun control in the decades since the 103rd Congress. Yet did this realignment impact the dissolution of each party's minority opposition group equally?

Regional realignment

Table 1: Regional realignment in Congress* (103rd (1993-1994) vs. 115th (2017-2018))

Region	Democrats 103rd	Democrats 115th	Republicans 103rd	Republicans 115th	Swing
Northeast	H: 50 seats S: 11 seats 61 of 105 seats (58%)	H: 50 seats S: 13 seats 63 of 93 seats (68%)	H: 38 seats S: 6 seats 44 of 105 seats (42%)	H: 28 seats S: 2 seats 30 of 93 seats (32%)	**+10% D**
Midwest	H: 61 seats S:15 seats 76 of 128 seats (59%)	H: 33 seats S: 11 seats 44 of 118 seats (37%)	H: 43 seats S: 9 seats 52 of 128 seats (41%)	H: 61 seats S: 13 seats 74 of 118 seats (63%)	+22% R
South	H: 91 seats S: 18 seats 109 of 179 seats (61%)	H: 49 seats S: 8 seats 57 of 194 seats (29%)	H: 56 seats S: 14 seats 70 of 179 seats (39%)	H: 113 seats S: 24 seats 137 of 194 seats (71%)	**+32% R**
West	H: 54 seats S: 11 seats 65 of 118 seats (55%)	H: 63 seats S: 13 seats 76 of 129 seats (59%)	H: 40 seats S: 15 seats 53 of 118 seats (45%)	H: 40 seats S: 13 seats 53 of 129 seats (41%)	+4% D

*Because of Congressional reapportionment (the process by which Congressional districts in the House are redrawn three years after population figures are released via the U.S Census), some House districts become obsolete and some new districts are added based on decreases or increases in the population of each state ('Reapportionment.' House.gov). Since the number of House seats in each region has changed over time, regional change in the above chart has been tracked by overall percentage of seats held in each region rather than the total number of seats gained or lost.

Regional realignment and the Republican party

Between the 103rd and 115th Congresses, the Republican party lost ten percent of its seats in the Northeast (the region which has historically had the lowest gun ownership levels and highest percentage of Congressional support for gun control), while it increased its share of Southern seats (the region which has historically had the highest gun ownership levels and lowest levels of Congressional support for gun control)(Pew 2017) by a significant margin- over thirty percent. For the party of gun rights to have fewer Northeastern seats and more Southern seats increases the probability of party line voting on the gun issue irrespective of other factors; for this reason, regional realignment can justifiably be credited with contributing to the decline in Congressional Republican support for gun control in the decades since the 103rd Congress.

Yet as this thesis has demonstrated, regional influence on Republican voting has been relatively insignificant since the party united in favor of gun rights during the transition decade of the 2000s when the gun control issue lay dormant. The same lack of regional divides in voting first seen then has characterized Republican voting ever since, even after the gun control debate was resurrected in late 2012. Over time, the significant electoral pressure Republicans have come to face to oppose gun control to be "good conservatives" and fend off primary challenge threats has impacted party members across regions; because of this, electoral pressures and incentives specific to regional location are no longer as relevant in influencing gun control voting for Republicans as they once were. For example, competitive seats that continue to be held by Republicans in the Northeast have not seen a major reversal on the gun issue since the gun control debate was revitalized. In New Jersey, former pro-control Republicans Chris Smith and Rodney Frelinghuysen (both representatives of suburban districts) have not reembraced their former positions since they shifted in favor of gun rights during the mid-2000s; meanwhile both have faced an onslaught of primary challenges in the last decade (refer to discussion on page 189). During the 103rd Congress (1993-1994) all six Republican House representatives from New Jersey voted for the Brady bill and four of the six for the Assault weapons ban; by the 115th Congress only one of the five New Jersey Republicans in the House opposed concealed carry gun rights legislation.

Regional realignment and the Democratic party

Between the 103rd and 115th Congresses, the most significant regional change to occur for the Democratic party was the loss of 32 percent of its seats in the South. As with the Republican party, for the party of gun control to have fewer seats in the South increases the probability of party line voting irrespective of other factors, making this significant degree of Southern realignment a key contributing factor to declining Democratic opposition to gun control.

And while shifts in the Democratic party have occurred within regions in recent years as the party has come to view gun control as an electorally valuable issue again nationally, (for example, Democratic Southern support for concealed carry reciprocity legislation declined from 28 percent to 4 percent between 2011 and 2017) as has been demonstrated throughout the thesis, competitive state Democrats are prone to vacillate on the gun issue. And as discussed in Chapter Seven, increasing Democratic unity in the Senate in the years after Sandy Hook was aided by the replacement of red state, anti-control Democrats who had not shifted positions to vote the party line- their stable positions an indication that electoral incentives specific to regional location remain relevant for Congressional Democrats.

District realignment

Table 2: District realignment in the House (103rd (1993-1994) vs. 115th (2017-2018))

District type	Democrats 103rd	Democrats 115th	Republicans 103rd	Republicans 115th	Swing	Region with biggest % change
urban	90 of 112 (80%)	79 of 102 (77%)	22 of 112 (20%)	23 of 102 (23%)	+3% R	South
mixed/suburban	124 of 253 (49%)	106 of 283 (37%)	129 of 253 (51%)	177 of 283 (63%)	+12% R	South
rural	37 of 60 (62%)	9 of 50 (18%)	23 of 60 (38%)	41 of 50 (82%)	**+44% R**	South

*The same point about Congressional reapportionment made previously also holds here; thus district level change in the above chart has been tracked by overall percentage of seats held in a region rather than the number of seats gained or lost.

District realignment and the Republican party

Since the 103rd Congress, the Republican party has increased its share of all three district types in the House, the biggest percentage gain being rural districts (the district type with the highest gun ownership levels and lowest levels of Congressional support for gun control) (Pew 2017). And while this gain was important, as with region, the most critical change impacting Republican polarization was not district realignment itself, but rather how the electoral incentives of the types of representatives who once supported gun control changed.

For example, representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-27th), was one of the few formerly pro-control urban Republicans from the previous era who remained during the 115th Congress. With crime rates (both nationally and in the city of Miami, Florida where her district was located), public concerns about crime, and public support for gun control all peaking in the early 1990s, Ros-Lehtinen consistently voted for gun control during that decade. Yet by the time the gun control debate was revitalized in late 2012 and the primary focus had shifted from general crime control to preventing mass shootings, she would not reclaim her former pro-control position, rather telling reporters that "more laws are not going to stop these killings" (Ossowski 2012, 1). With crime no longer a priority political issue and the focus of the debate having changed, it has become easier for urban Republicans in competitive districts to distance themselves from the issue; they can redirect discussions about "drive-through, drive-by, and drive-in shootings" (103rd Cong. Rec. H9093 (1993)) in their cities to isolated mass shooting incidents in suburban communities hundreds of miles away. The same can be said for suburban adjacent to urban area Republicans (like former Brady bill supporter Jim Sensenbrenner (WI-5th)), who no longer need to reassure their crime concerned constituents that they are working to "Reclaim our streets and our communities for our families" (Clymer 1991) by preventing urban crime from bleeding into the suburbs.

District realignment and the Democratic party

For the Democratic party, the most significant change to occur since the 103rd Congress has been losing 28 rural seats to Republicans, the majority of which were in the South. This loss is a crucial contributing factor to Democratic polarization, as unlike for urban and suburban adjacent to urban Republicans, electoral incentives for rural

representatives have not changed significantly over time. Today, rural districts continue to have comparatively high gun ownership rates and low levels of public support for gun control compared to urban and suburban districts, while NRA membership (these members often being single issue voters) has historically been strongest in rural areas (Gray Davidson 1993). And given the composition of their districts, rural Democrats are unlikely to be attacked for their pro-gun position by a Democratic challenger in a primary or their Republican challenger in the general election, while considering that rural Democrats themselves are a dying breed, it is safer for them to maintain the status quo than change and take a major electoral risk. Overall, the electoral incentives for rural Democrats to oppose gun control/support gun rights remain the same in the mass shooting era as in the crime concerned one; that the handful of House Democrats who crossed party lines on the gun rights votes of 2017 were nearly all rural Democrats is indicative of this.

Regional/district realignment and polarization stability

In conclusion, regional and district realignment are both contributing factors to the shift towards near complete polarization in the decades since the 103rd Congress, as having more Republicans in the seats least likely to support gun control (and fewer Democrats in them) increases the probability of party line voting irrespective of other factors. Yet crucially, this realignment trend has not impacted polarization for each party equally. Because electoral pressures and incentives specific to region and district type remain relevant for Democrats today but are no longer significant for Republicans, realignment itself has impacted the Democratic more than the Republican shift. And for this reason, a reversal of realignment is more likely to impact the current state of Democratic rather than Republican unity- another factor indicating that Democratic polarization is less stable.

Partisan asymmetry 4: Political ideology and gun issue positions

As has been discussed throughout the thesis, political ideology and gun issue positions have not always aligned (with conservative Republicans voting for gun control and liberal Democrats against it), a factor unique to the issue which made the existing explanations in the polarization literature (increasing partisan polarization being the product of increasing ideological polarization) insufficient for fully understanding partisan

polarization on gun control. Yet how has this once incomplete alignment changed in the decades since the 103rd Congress, and has it changed for both parties?

Common sense conservatives

During the crime concerned decade of the 1990s, some conservatives (particularly urban and suburban near urban House members and Senators of states with large urban areas) viewed supporting gun control as an electorally valuable component of their 'tough on crime' position; these conservatives framed their support as a 'common sense' approach to combating crime (for examples of this 'common sense' rhetoric refer to page 102). Yet as the salience of crime as a priority political issue declined and conservative groups began targeting 'not conservative' enough Republicans for primary challenges, it was no longer electorally expedient for conservatives to support gun control. And when the gun control debate was resurrected after the Sandy Hook shooting in December 2012, the focus had changed from gun control as a component of general crime control to gun control as a specific response to mass shootings; supporting gun control was no longer about being 'tough on crime,' nor was it tied to a priority political issue. These changes, coupled with the advent of the Tea Party in 2010 and the increasingly high stakes nature of the primary system, has meant that even with the resurrection of the debate, supporting gun control has ceased to be viewed as an electorally valuable position for conservatives. As a result, a faction of 'common sense' conservatives for gun control has not reemerged.

Liberal anti-controllers

In the years since the resurrection of the gun control debate after Sandy Hook, most liberal Democrats in Congress have embraced their party's pro-control agenda. Yet given the lack of a liberal enforcement mechanism such as exists in the Republican party for conservatives (for example with no liberal equivalent to the Tea Party, no wealthy network of liberal groups involved at the primary stage, or liberal primary voters actively ousting moderate Democrats in competitive seats), in the current state it is less electorally risky for liberal Democrats to oppose gun control than for conservative Republicans to support it.

As discussed previously, liberal anti-controllers have often been rural representatives, as despite their ideological leanings, such representatives have little electoral incentive to support gun control. One of the few remaining anti-control Democrats in the House during

the 115th Congress was rural representative Ron Kind (WI-3rd). Kind, a career anti-controller and gun rights supporter, opposed the McCarthy background checks amendment during the post Columbine debates of 1999, while also voting for all the Republican gun rights bills discussed throughout the thesis, including the two most recent votes in the House in 2017. Yet with the exception of his gun control position, Kind has a liberal voting record (his DW-nominate score of -.293 putting him in the first, liberal quintile of the 115th Congress), earning him A ratings from liberal groups such as NARAL pro-choice America, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and the League of Conservation Voters, as well as an F rating from the American Conservative Union ('Interest group ratings,' Project Vote Smart 2017). And as was the case for many similar Democrats discussed in the thesis whose gun control voting was influenced by regional/district type considerations, Kind's second dimension DW-nominate score (.439) was significantly higher than his first dimension score.

Overall, while in the current hyper partisan Congressional context most liberal Democrats are committed to the pro-control position, due to the lack of a liberal enforcement mechanism and because regional location/district type remain relevant variables impacting Democratic voting on the gun issue, liberal representatives (and particularly Southern or rural ones) remain electorally freer to cross ideological lines than their conservative colleagues in the Republican party. So the incomplete alignment between political ideology and gun issue positions now only relevant for liberal Democrats.

Partisan asymmetries and polarization stability: Conclusions

As of the 115th Congress (2017-2018), the Democratic and Republican parties are united in their support for and opposition to gun control. Yet they followed different trajectories to arrive at this point, their respective shifts motivated by disparate factors. This section has unpacked and summarized the most critical differences between the party shifts, identifying which variables were relevant for each party (in parentheses)- including the decline of crime (Republicans), the primary electorate (Republicans), and regional/district realignment (Democrats). It has also explained how these variables impacted the alignment of ideology and gun issue positions (the incomplete alignment that once existed in both now only remaining relevant for liberal Democrats), and their overall implications for polarization stability.

In conclusion, Republicans today have a solid partisan pressure mechanism (primary voters) to keep them united in opposition to gun control, while lacking a comparable such mechanism, Democrats have more freedom to vacillate depending upon the salience of the issue nationally and their individual electoral circumstances at a given time. Meanwhile, the electoral pressures and incentives specific to region and district type that once influenced both parties now remain more relevant for Democrats than Republicans, making a reversal of this realignment trend (irrespective of other changes) more likely to impact Democratic unity in support for gun control than Republican unity in opposition to it. Taken as a whole, the implications of these partisan asymmetries indicate that Republican polarization is more stable than Democratic polarization.

Part III: Findings for the wider literature

This thesis's case study of Congressional gun control polarization in the decades since the 103rd Congress has demonstrated that in many ways, gun control has its own unique polarization story. First, there was the role played by crime; the interconnected relationship between crime and gun control and the decline of the formers influence on Republican polarization in regard to the latter is a crucial element of this polarization story, and one that is unique to gun control. Additionally, the way in which location, and specifically region/district type, has impacted Congressional gun control voting is another variable specific to the issue. The correlation between location and gun voting is best illustrated through the second dimension of DW-nominate, which is particularly useful at picking up inter-party divides within the Democratic party on the gun issue, as location is the key variable relevant for understanding Democratic opposition to gun control. Overall, these variables fostered both bipartisan support for and opposition to gun control- for some members superseding both partisanship, and critically, political ideology. The latter is another point of distinction, as there were conservative Republicans supporting gun control and liberal Democrats opposing it whose gun control position was their main deviation from an otherwise consistently conservative or liberal voting record.

Also unique to gun control polarization was the timeframe of the party shifts. The Republican shift in the mid-2000s can best be understood in the context of political opportunity, as the decline of crime critically impacted both when the Republican leadership began pursuit of a gun rights agenda and how opposition group members responded to this pursuit. For the

Democratic party, the leadership's decision to distance the party from the gun control issue during this timeframe led to an increase in support for gun rights, the party's anti-control minority opposition group growing as its Republican counterpart waned. Only after party leaders decided to reclaim the issue as a legislative priority after the Sandy Hook shooting in late 2012 did Democratic opposition to gun control begin to dissolve as competitive state, swing vote members came to swing in support of the party's pro-control cause. Overall, the thesis has demonstrated that the agenda setting decisions of party leaders critically impacted each party's polarization trajectory- their timing precipitating the dissolution of their respective minority opposition groups and subsequent party shifts.

This case study was undertaken because there were interesting questions relevant to the gun control issue (such as why there was an incomplete alignment between political ideology and gun issue positions, and why members of both parties shifted positions on the issue over time) which could not be explained by the existing polarization literature. Finding answers to these questions, and in doing so identifying variables specific to gun control polarization, made such a study empirically valuable in its own right. Yet in addition to offering an explanation for the shift towards hyper polarization in the decades since the 103rd Congress, what findings can this case study contribute to the broader literature, and in particular the polarization and gun control literatures?

Findings for the polarization literature

Partisan asymmetry and polarization

For the polarization literature, the thesis's findings contribute to a broader understanding of how and why the parties polarize differently. That both parties have not always contributed equally to increasing polarization levels and that Republicans are often the primary driver (many arguing because the party has produced a more conservative cohort in Congress since the late 1970s) has been widely cited (Sinclair 2006, Poole and Rosenthal 2007, McCarty 2015). However, as this thesis has demonstrated, increasing partisan polarization in Congress is about far more than just increasing ideological polarization. For critically, it is also about how the electoral pressures and incentives of party members change over time. In line with this argument, the thesis's finding that the parties had their own unique gun control polarization trajectories bolsters the utility of 'partisan asymmetry' as a lens through which to approach the study of partisan polarization in Congress. Beginning with an

understanding that the parties often have distinct and disparate electoral pressures and incentives in regard to an issue which directly impact when and why they polarize will help to more efficiently and effectively explain party shifts and increasing polarization on specific issues beyond relying on a single theory (such as increasing ideological polarization due to the replacement of moderates, which could not fully explain increasing partisan polarization on gun control). Additionally, as Part II of this chapter discussed, the disparate factors impacting party shifts means partisan asymmetry also has implications for polarization stability; this understanding can be useful for developing more accurate predictive theories about future polarization levels.

Political opportunity and polarization

Additionally, the thesis's findings contribute to a broader understanding of how political opportunity can play a significant role in the polarization process, and particularly by impacting the timing of significant party shifts on specific issues. Sundquist (1983) theorized that the parties would polarize on issues one at a time, depending on the national political context and other factors (such as who has majority control of Congress) which create political opportunity for a party's shift. As this thesis has demonstrated, political opportunity is key to understanding the Republican party's shift in favor of gun rights in the mid-2000s, as the decline in salience of crime as a priority political issue (coupled with the removal of the institutional barrier of the presidential veto) critically impacted both when Republican leaders began pursuit of a gun rights agenda and how opposition group members responded to this pursuit.

The importance of political opportunity has been cited in regard to party shifts and increasing polarization on other issues; for example, scholars have argued that party activists (who formed a religious organization with political goals called the Moral Majority in 1979) saw in Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign a political opportunity to unite Christians under the banner of the Republican party- their efforts leading the Republican party to establish a pro-life party platform position which initiated polarization on the abortion issue (Tygiel 2004, Sinclair 2006, Levendusky 2009). On the issue of gay rights, Karol (2012) argues that a major shift occurred within the Democratic party from the mid-1990s to the end of the first decade of the 2000s. With a network of LGBTQ activist groups becoming involved over the decades in Democratic campaigns and with public opinion beginning to

swing decisively in favor,[8] the Democratic party acted on the political opportunity to take a firm stance in support of gay rights and set themselves apart from Republicans (who, with their ties to Evangelical Christian organizations, were opposed). Party support for legislation such as the Defense of Marriage Act and a ban on openly gay members serving in the military dissolved, while the party officially incorporated support for same sex marriage into their official party platform in 2012.

Whether in regard to how polarization initially came about due to party position taking (abortion in the early 1980s), or related to key shifts driving increasing polarization as the parties have united on specific issues (Republicans on gun control in the mid-2000s and Democrats on gay rights in the late 2000s) political opportunity often plays a critical role in the polarization process and its timing. The thesis's findings bolster the utility of this concept as a lens through which to analyze and understand partisan polarization. For when it comes to specific issues such as gun control, changing variables such as debate framing, public opinion, and party control can crucially impact the constraints and opportunities of political actors at a given time- influencing the strategies of interest groups and party activists, the agenda setting choices and timing of party leaders, and the voting decisions of party members.

Political actors and polarization

This study also contributes to the literature which focuses on specific political actors and their contribution to partisan polarization. For example, the thesis's analysis of the role of gun issue interest groups (primarily the NRA and the Brady Campaign) and how they came to align with and shift their resources in support of the party most capable and willing to help them achieve their policy goals adds to the body of work which argues that interest groups have not been responsible for driving increasing polarization but rather have polarized alongside the parties (Sinclair 2006, Levendusky 2009, Rosenthal 2017), such groups having been "drawn into the zero sum logic of two party competition, enlisting as soldiers for one or the other major party" (Rosenthal 2017, 205). In terms of party activists, the thesis has shown that while gun rights activists were not responsible for driving increasing partisan

[8] For example, in 1993 only 44 percent of respondents to a Washington Post/ABC News poll favored allowing openly gay individuals to serve in the military; by 2008 75 percent of respondents did (Karol 2012, 21). Similarly, in 1996 only 25 percent of Americans supported gay marriage, while by 2011 a majority (54 percent) did (Karol 2012, 22).

polarization on the issue, the advent of the Tea Party and the growth of well funded conservative groups has significantly contributed to uniting Republicans in opposition to gun control. These findings lend credence to the importance of conservative party activists generally as a prominent contributor to increasing polarization at the Congressional level (Aldrich and Rohde 2001, Sinclair 2006, Layman et al 2010, Grossman and Hopkins 2016).

Additionally, in the 'chicken or the egg' debate over the direction of polarization causality between political elites and the mass electorate, this thesis has provided evidence in support of the argument that political elites polarize first and the electorate sorts in response, partisans bringing their issue positions in line with their party identification (Jacoby 1988, Hetherington 2001, Carsey and Layman 2006, Levendusky 2009). For gun control, this sorting was particularly evident amongst Republican partisans, as a significant decrease in support for gun control amongst this group began to occur several years after Congressional Republicans united in favor of gun rights in the mid-2000s. (refer to graph and discussion on page 202). Proponents of sorting contend that partisan voters will often adopt the issue position that their party holds generally, but will not necessarily embrace all aspects of it (Levendusky 2009). This explains why on the general 'gun control versus gun rights' question the partisan gap in the electorate has widened immensely as the parties have polarized on the issue, yet when polled about specific gun control measures such as background checks, there is more bipartisan consensus within the electorate, particularly in comparison to Congressional Republicans (see examples on page 235).

Conversion and polarization

As a final point related to the polarization literature, this case study contributes to a small but growing scholarship which has contested the prevailing wisdom that party shifts and increasing polarization almost exclusively occur through the process of replacement. For despite arguments that replacement must be the mechanism for change because members of Congress "do not adapt their positions during their careers but simply enter and maintain a fixed position until they die, retire, or are defeated" (Poole and Rosenthal, 2007, 97), this thesis has shown that numerous members of both parties have shifted positions on the gun control issue in the decades since the 103rd Congress, this conversion contributing to increasing levels of polarization along with replacement. While members of Congress are aware that "vacillating on highly visible and emotional issues...is politically risky" (Adams

1997, 5) the thesis has demonstrated that members will shift on controversial issues such as gun control if there is electoral incentive to do so. These findings complement other works which have found evidence of conversion to contest the 'solely about replacement' narrative; Wolbrecht (2002) found notable shifts in Democratic support for women's issues between 1972 and 1980,[9] while Karol (2012) determined that conversion, and not replacement, was the primary process behind the shift in support for gay rights amongst Congressional Democrats.[10] And while these studies primarily found evidence of Democratic conversion, this case study of Congressional gun control polarization critically contributes evidence of conversion in both parties.

Findings for the party literature

Conservatism and gun control

This case study also adds to a broader understanding of how the nature of conservatism, and by extension, Republicanism, has changed in the decades since the 103rd Congress. The thesis has demonstrated that with being 'tough on crime' a core part of what it meant to be a conservative (Dagan and Teles 2016) and with the salience of crime elevating the electoral pressure to support gun control for certain members, the Reagan era brand of conservatism allowed for a degree of flexibility (with Reagan himself supporting the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban) when it came to the gun control issue which did not extend to other issues. During this era, being 'common sense' for gun control did not detract from one's conservatism in the same way that being pro-life did; some of the party's most conservative members (such as Jim Sensenbrenner and future Tea Party co-founder Pete Hoekstra) not only voted for gun control but vocally endorsed it. And while the emergence of Tea Party conservatism and how it has led Reagan era conservatives to shift further to the right on the ideological continuum was perhaps on its own enough to prevent the return of common sense conservatives for gun control, due to the decline of crime and the debate shift

[9] Using the Convention Delegate Studies (1972-1992) survey data of delegates to the major party conventions, Wolbrecht determined that while replacement was the primary causal mechanism explaining a shift within the Republican party, in the case of the Democratic party, conversion was a critical contributing factor bringing about party realignment on the issue of women's rights. Amongst Democratic delegates who were present in both 1972 and 1980, survey scores indicated a notable shift in support for women's issues amongst this cohort (268).

[10] Analyzing roll call voting on gay rights legislation, Karol tracked the shifting positions of Democrats over time; for example, in regard to legislation banning openly gay members from serving in the military, he found that between 1993 and 2010, "Most of the Democrats who had favored the ban in 1993 opposed it by 2010" (24).

to focus on mass shootings, the electoral value of supporting gun control for conservatives had faded before this.

Ultimately, viewing conservatism through the lens of the gun control issue specifically and tracking how this relationship has changed over time helps to illuminate how the areas of flexibility within conservatism have shifted in the transition from the Reagan era to the Tea Party era. Meanwhile, the relationship between liberalism and the gun issue (and how concerns related to region/district type can supersede ideology) has not changed to the same extent.

Findings for the Congressional leadership literature

The thesis's analysis of the behavior of Congressional leaders (and particularly that of the Republican leadership, whose assertive procedural style set them apart) also contributes to the wider literature on Congressional leadership behavior. Much of this literature focuses on the degree to which the leadership's control over agenda setting outcomes is constrained by the will of the party majority (Jones 1968, Cooper and Brady 1981, Cox and McCubbins 1993), some even contending that the significance of these constraints are such that party leaders are more or less interchangeable (Krehbiel 1991, Sinclair 1999). More recent work however (particularly in the post-Gingrich era of the mid-1990s) lends increasing significance to the role that individual personality and leadership style play in determining how successfully leaders are able to navigate institutional constraints and wield power (Rohde 2000, Strahan 2007, Evans and Grandy 2009, Green 2010).

In terms of the Republican leadership's gun rights pursuit in the mid-2000s, this thesis has demonstrated that for the most part these leaders operated within, and did not subvert, institutional and political constraints. As discussed in Chapter Five, such constraints (primarily a pro-control Democratic president in office (Clinton) and the salience of crime as a priority political issue) kept them from pursuing gun rights despite their newfound agenda setting ability in 1995. And when they did take advantage of the political opportunity to begin agenda setting on gun rights, this pursuit was in line with the wishes of the party majority, which had long been comprised of anti-controllers.

Yet despite their behavior falling within the parameters of what the literature expects of party leaders, as has been demonstrated, their individual personalities and leadership style is critical to understanding the party's gun rights pursuit. These leaders, who were themselves fervent supporters of gun rights, took the initiative on behalf of themselves and the party majority. It was a bold and assertive pursuit, akin to the flexing of political muscle- with party leaders putting bills on the floor without committee markups, using procedural maneuvers to limit debate and bar amendments, and moving to (successfully) push the legislation through quickly. In the words of House Majority leader Tom DeLay, the Republican leaders of this era were "ideologues" with "an agenda" (Dubois and Reid 96) who, as the thesis has shown, acted boldly and decisively to implement their desired agenda when the political opportunity arose. Overall, the thesis's analysis of the Republican leadership adds to the classic body of work which contends that party leaders largely operate within institutional and political constraints. Yet critically, it also contests the notion that party leaders are more or less interchangeable, and bolsters more recent scholarship which lends significance to the importance of personality and leadership style on agenda setting decisions and outcomes.

Findings for the gun control literature

For the gun control literature, and in particular the field which focuses on policy stagnation, the thesis's findings critically contribute to an understanding of both the political conditions which led to the passage of gun control and the key barriers to its passage at the federal level today. In addition to the difficulties inherent in a federalist system which make passing any federal legislation, let alone divisive legislation with well organized, single issue voter opposition such as gun control (Squires 2000, Vizzard 2000, Goss 2006, Spitzer 2012), the most obvious barrier in the years since the debate was revitalized in late 2012 has been Republicans. No longer able to count on bipartisan support and without a majority in the House or supermajority (of 60 or more) in the Senate, through the 115th Congress (2017-2018) the Democratic party has been unable to pass any new gun controls since Sandy Hook.

As this thesis has demonstrated, the salience of crime and its entanglement with gun control was critical for fostering bipartisan support for gun control in the 1990s and seeing the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban signed into law during the 103rd Congress. Understanding how electoral incentives for Republicans have changed since then critically

helps to illuminate why in the present Democrats can no longer count on their support. Overall, the thesis has shown how the decline of crime and the gun control debates shift in focus from gun control as general crime control to gun control as a specific policy response to mass shooting events has not been a positive change for the gun control movement. Before, the debate occurred in the context of peaking crime rates and public fear of crime, with the notion that urban crime was bleeding into the suburbs a widespread one. Today, gun control is debated in the context of mass shootings, which are often painted as random occurrences by lone, mentally ill individuals in far away suburbs. Related to this shift in debate focus, perhaps the most critical factor impacting the loss of Republican support for gun control is that, despite public support increasing in the years since Sandy Hook, gun control is no longer linked to a priority political issue, which means it is not a general election issue. Because of this, general public pressure to support gun control has not been significant enough to supersede pressure from the primary electorate to oppose it- the primary over the general now the most electorally salient voting bloc for most Republicans when it comes to the gun issue.

As for Democrats, while the party is currently united and committed to advancing a pro-control agenda, gun control advocates and scholars should not assume that this current state is fixed. For critically, as has been demonstrated throughout the thesis, the Democratic party's relationship to the gun control issue over the last twenty plus years has been a tenuous one- as members in competitive states and districts have been prone to vacillate depending on the salience of the issue for the party nationally.

In conclusion, this case study has contributed to the wider gun control literature by identifying key variables relevant for understanding bipartisanship and the successful passage of gun control- identifying the electoral pressures/ incentives and political conditions which fostered the passage of the most significant federal gun controls in the country's history during the 103rd Congress. It has also demonstrated how the decline of crime, the shifting focus of the debate, and the changing electoral incentives of Republicans in the decades since has significantly contributed to federal gun control policy stagnation in the present.

Part IV: Avenues for future research

Polarization research

This thesis has raised questions and drawn attention to empirically valuable concepts which merit future research- to start, the process of studying polarization using a case study approach. While general theories of polarization which apply across a broad range of issues are empirically valuable, as this thesis has demonstrated, because the parties often have distinct electoral incentives, there can be inconsistencies or questions relevant to specific issues which cannot be fully or adequately explained by broader theories of polarization. While this was the case for gun control, it is plausible that there are other issues where the existing literature is not sufficient for understanding partisan polarization. And while polarization on certain issues such as abortion have been covered, there are other issues which have not been explored in great depth which could prove an interesting study- including healthcare, immigration, and global warming. Overall, an in depth, focused, micro level case study approach to studying polarization on specific issues (as this thesis has done with gun control) has the potential to fill gaps in the general polarization literature and produce compelling and consequential work.

Another avenue for further research involves the role of conversion in contributing to increasing partisan polarization. As discussed in Part III of this chapter, this thesis contributes to a small but growing body of scholarship which contests the prevailing narrative that changes in Congressional voting patterns must occur almost entirely through the process of replacement, as members of Congress do not shift positions on issues over time "but simply enter and maintain a fixed position until they die, retire, or are defeated" (Poole and Rosenthal 2007, 97). Attempting to identify other issues where conversion has contributed to increasing polarization levels would be a worthwhile pursuit with the potential to make a significant contribution to this small but burgeoning sub-field of the literature.

Gun control polarization stability

Part II of this chapter offered an assessment of the stability of the current state of Congressional gun control polarization, determining that the implications of the existing partisan asymmetries suggest that Democratic polarization is less stable than Republican polarization. Yet lacking a crystal ball which provides a glimpse into the future, this contention is only a theory; assessing the merits of this theory is an option for future research. For example, the thesis has argued that one reason Democratic polarization may be less stable is because electoral pressures and incentives specific to region/district type remain relevant

for Democrats but are no longer as significant for Republicans. So how might a reversal of the regional/district realignment trend which has occurred in the decades since the 103rd Congress impact current polarization levels? Would Democrats gaining back a significant number of rural or Southern seats bring about the return of a minority opposition group to the party?

Additionally, the thesis has demonstrated that while the public has been galvanized by the issue in the years since Sandy Hook, gun control has not achieved the status of priority political/general election issue (as when it was linked to crime). Because of this, the thesis contends that for most Republicans, the general public pressure to support gun control has not been electorally significant enough to supersede primary electorate pressure to oppose it. But if gun control were to become a key general election issue in the future, how might this change impact polarization? Would it bring about a return to bipartisanship, or has the gun control issue become too entwined with partisan identity to make a difference? These are intriguing questions which, if the aforementioned scenarios came to fruition, would merit further research on gun control polarization.

Part V: Concluding remarks

Hyper polarization: Typical or unusual?

The state of hyper polarization on gun control seen in Congress today is not atypical- the parties have become significantly polarized on numerous issues; Lee (2009) even demonstrating that votes on legislation which one would not expect to be divisive (such as procedural votes, anti-corruption votes, and votes on the administration of government) have nonetheless been divided along party lines. But while hyper polarization has become a fixture in Congress today, what differs from issue to issue is the timing when this state is reached. As discussed in Chapter Four, during the 103rd Congress the parties were almost completely polarized on votes relating to voting rights and Clinton's budget (see table on page 82), but were only moderately polarized on gun control- as there were factors influencing gun control voting which cut across partisanship and political ideology. And while the parties are currently both united on the issue, as recently as 2013 Democrats were divided (mainly along regional lines). Thus gun control votes were not as partisan polarized as other votes held on controversial/high profile issues around the same timeframe- such as the 2009 Senate vote for

the passage of the Affordable Care Act (often referred to as 'Obamacare') or a 2011 House vote for legislation to continue banning federal funding for abortion.

Table 3: Polarization on Healthcare, Abortion, and Gun rights/Gun control (2009-2013)

Legislation	Democrats	Republicans	Measure of polarization
Affordable Care Act (2009-Senate)	58 yes (100%)	39 no (100%)	1.00
No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act (2011-House)	16 of 192 yes (8%) 175 of 192 no (92%)	235 yes (100%)	.92
Concealed carry reciprocity (**gun rights)** (2011-House)	43 yes (23%) 147 no (77%)	229 yes (97%) 7 no (3%)	.74
Assault Weapons ban (2013-Senate)	38 yes (72%) 15 no (28%)	1 yes (2%) 44 no (98%)	.70

For despite the hyper partisan state in Congress generally (which was only heightened during the Obama presidency) and on issues such as healthcare and abortion specifically, with the gun control debate having just been revitalized after a near decade of dormancy in late 2012, it took time for swing vote Democrats to determine there was electoral value in supporting gun control and fully embrace their party's renewed pro-control cause. Ultimately, whether an issue like gun control has become hyper polarized depends on whether the electoral incentives of most members in Congress are aligned with the position of their party.

The limits of polarization

Yet if the thesis has revealed anything, it is that even in a hyper partisan polarized climate, members will cross the party line if there is electoral incentive to do so. While the opposition groups within each party that used to exist have dissolved over time, as the thesis has demonstrated, there remains what appears to be a not fully reducible minimum of inter-party opposition, if only consisting of a handful of members on each side. And this minimum of party opposition appears to hold for other divisive partisan issues. For example, the

Republican party's attempt to repeal Obamacare in July 2017 failed because three Republican Senators (John McCain (AZ), Susan Collins (ME), and Lisa Murkowski (AK)) crossed party lines to oppose it (Senate Vote 179, 115th Congress, 28 July 2017), while despite the bitterly partisan debate over the nomination of D.C Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court in October 2018, one Democrat (Joe Manchin (WV) and one Republican (Senator Lisa Murkowski (AK)) deviated from the party line (Senate Vote 223, 115th Congress, 8 October 2018).

This lack of total partisan polarization speaks to the inherent complexity of the electoral calculations of members of Congress generally. For gun control, even if currently most Republicans have electoral incentive to oppose it and most Democrats electoral incentive to support it, with 100 members in the Senate and 435 in the House, it is plausible that there will be at least a handful of representatives in each whose political circumstances and electoral incentives diverge from the majority of their party. Thus in the hyper partisan context of the present, the 'near complete' polarization on the gun control issue evident in Congress today is likely a reflection of partisan polarization at its limit.

Summary of thesis

In conclusion, the primary research question of this thesis was the following: What explains the shift from moderate levels to near complete partisan polarization on gun control at the Congressional level which has occurred in the decades since the successful passage of the Brady bill and the Assault weapons ban during the 103rd Congress?

The short answer is that this shift was the product of the dissolution of opposition groups within each party. For the Republican party, the key variables impacting the party's shift over this timeframe were the decline in salience of crime as a priority political issue (which weakened the electoral significance of gun control) and the transition from the general to the primary electorate as the more salient voting bloc in regard to gun control. For the Democratic party, the key variables impacting the party's shift were regional/district realignment, coupled with gun control being re established as an electorally valuable issue for the party nationally in the years after Sandy Hook, leading most purple/competitive state members to swing in support of the party's pro-control cause.

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Appendix: Breakdown of key legislation

Gun control legislation

Background checks

Brady bill (1993): Mandated a system of federal background checks on firearms purchasers; implemented a five day waiting period for handgun purchases and a three day waiting period for licensed dealers at gun shows.

Lautenberg/McCarthy amendment (1999): Require that all dealers (both licensed and unlicensed-the latter had not been subject to the background check or waiting period provisions of the Brady bill) at gun shows perform background checks; 3 business day waiting period for handgun purchases.

Craig/Dingell amendment (Republican sponsored) (1999): Republican alternative to the Lautenberg/McCarthy amendments. Required that all dealers at gun shows perform background checks; 24 hour waiting period for handgun purchases.

Manchin-Toomey amendment (2013): Subject unlicensed dealers at gun shows to federal background check laws; subject online sales of firearms to a background check.

Murphy amendment (2016): Same as Manchin-Toomey; additionally end background check exemption for person to person firearm sales/transfers, only allowing family and friend transfers.

Did proposed background checks legislation become stricter over time? Yes and No. The Lautenberg and McCarthy amendments of 1999 did expand upon the existing law by subjecting unlicensed dealers at gun shows to the background check and waiting period provisions of the Brady law. The Republican alternative amendments of 1999 would have expanded upon the existing law by requiring unlicensed dealers be subject to background checks and a waiting period, but with their 24 hour universal waiting period for gun dealers these amendments would have weakened the existing law that subjected licensed dealers to a three day waiting period under Brady. The Manchin-Toomey amendment of 2013 combined the unlicensed dealer provisions of the Lautenberg/McCarthy amendments with a provision to subject online gun sales to background check laws, while the Murphy amendment of 2016 expanded upon Manchin-Toomey by ending the exemption for person to person (non family or friend) transfers. However, the 2013 and 2016 amendments were less strict than previous legislation in a critical way: neither contained a waiting period provision for handgun purchases (the waiting periods under the original Brady law had been phased out over time due to the implementation of the National Instant check system). Thus while over time the background checks legislation proposed by Democrats did continue to expand upon the existing law, in one key regard (the lack of a waiting period provision) the legislation proposed after the revitalization of the debate in 2013 was less strict than earlier background checks legislation.

Table 1: Key background checks legislation

Legislation/year	House/Senate?	Pass/Fail	Can make direct comparison to other votes?
Brady bill (1993)	Both	Passed	No
Lautenberg/McCarthy amendments (1999)	Lautenberg (Senate) McCarthy (House)	Passed Failed	No
Craig/Dingell amendments (1999)	Craig (Senate) Dingell (House)	Passed Passed	No
Manchin-Toomey amendment (2013)	Senate only	Failed	No
Murphy amendment (2016)	Senate only	Failed	No

Assault Weapons ban

Assault Weapons ban (1994): Prohibited the manufacture of nineteen assault style weapons and over 70 types of semi-automatic firearms; also banned large capacity ammunition magazines (holding more than ten rounds) for civilian use.

Assault Weapons ban (2013): Same as 1994 ban, but added some semi-automatic firearms to the ban list and did not include a ten year sunset provision.

Did the Assault Weapons ban become stricter over time? Yes, but it was similar enough to the original ban to allow for a reasonable direct comparison between votes.

Table 2: Assault weapons ban legislation

Legislation/year	House/Senate?	Pass/Fail	Can make direct comparison to other votes?
1994	Both	Passed	Yes
2013	Senate only	Fail	Yes

Terrorist watch list amendments

Feinstein amendment (2016): Grant the Attorney General discretion to prevent firearm sales to an individual on a federal terrorist watch list if there is a reasonable belief that the individual would use the firearm in connection with a terrorist act.

Cornyn amendment (Republican alternative)(2016): Would require federal prosecutors to demonstrate within 72 hours "probable cause" of criminal terrorist activity before an individual on a federal watch list could be prevented from buying a firearm.

Table 3: Terrorist watch list legislation

Legislation/year	House/Senate?	Pass/Fail	Can make direct comparison to other votes?
Feinstein amendment (2016)	Senate only	Fail	No
Cornyn amendment (2016)	Senate only	Fail	No

Gun rights legislation

D.C handgun ban repeal

Goode amendment (1999): Repeal the ban on private ownership of handguns and their ammunition that had existed in Washington, D.C since 1976. Would also allow residents to legally purchase semi-automatic weapons that were not prohibited by federal law, eliminate the requirement for citizens to register their firearms with the District, and abolish the requirement that rifles (which were legal) in the home be kept disassembled and locked up at all times.

DC Personal Protection Act (2004): Same as Goode amendment.

Table 4: DC handgun ban repeal votes

Legislation/year	House/Senate?	Pass/Fail	Can make direct comparison to other votes?
Goode amendment (1999)	House only	Failed	Yes
DC Personal Protection Act (2004)	House only	Passed	Yes

Gun liability bill

Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (2005): Shield manufacturers, distributors, dealers, and importers of firearms and ammunition from civil liability for injuries resulting from misuse of their products by others unless their actions were found to be criminally negligent.

Table 5: Gun liability legislation

Legislation/Year	House/Senate?	Pass/Fail	Can make direct comparison to other votes?
Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (2005)	Both	Passed	No

Concealed carry reciprocity

National Right-to-Carry Reciprocity Act (2011): Require that each state recognize out of state permits for the concealed carry of a handgun (even if the standards and requirements of that state's permit are weaker) allowing legal gun owners to concealed carry across state lines.

Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act (2017): Same as above; also included a provision to increase funding for the National Instant check background check system (NICS).

Table 6: Concealed carry reciprocity legislation

Legislation/Year	House/Senate?	Pass/Fail	Can make direct comparison to other votes?
National Right to Carry Reciprocity Act of 2011	House only	Passed	Yes
Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act of 2017	House only	Passed	Yes

Congressional Review Act Repeal

Congressional Review Act Repeal (2017): Repeal an Obama administration rule that required the Social Security Administration to disclose to the FBI information about individuals receiving disability benefits due to mental illness. The rule was implemented to improve the national instant background check system (NICS) by making it easier for the FBI to flag those with mental illness when doing background checks for firearm purchases.

Table 7: Congressional Review Act repeal

Legislation/Year	House/Senate?	Pass/Fail	Can make direct comparison to other votes?
Congressional Review Act repeal	Both	Passed	No