PUBLIC SAFETY

Expert Views on Gun Laws

Do researchers from different policy fields have a consensus on gun control laws?

BY ARTHUR Z. BERG, JOHN R. LOTT JR., AND GARY A. MAUSER

In a widely discussed pair of articles in 2017, the *New York Times* examined how well public opinion on gun control corresponded with the opinions of a panel of experts that the *Times* had selected. The first article, "How to Prevent Gun Deaths? Where Experts and the Public Agree" (Jan. 10, 2017), examined the effectiveness of a variety of policies at preventing firearm homicides. The second, "How to Reduce Mass Shooting Deaths? Experts Rank Gun Laws," (Oct. 5, 2017) focused on the effectiveness of gun control in reducing "mass shooting deaths." The *Times* said that its academic panel consisted of 32 "experts on gun violence," including criminologists, economists, and public health academics. "Only five said they oppose [gun control policies]," according to the *Times*, and those who opposed them "tended to particularly oppose blanket policies."

Previously in these pages, two of us presented survey results on criminologists' and economists' views of the relationship between gun ownership and crime or suicide. (See "Researcher Perceptions of Lawful Concealed Carry of Handguns," Summer 2016.) Now, we extend that earlier analysis. Here, we compare the views of public health researchers with those of criminologists and economists on a wide range of gun control policies. Specifically, we asked academics to assess the effect of these policies on mass public shootings and murder rates. Our survey obtained responses from 120 experts, nearly four times as many as the *Times*' panel. Among our respondents were 32 economists, 10 times more than the Ph.D. economists on the *Times* panel. Our respondents also included 38 criminologists and 50 public health researchers. Our results differ significantly from the *Times*' survey results.

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METHODOLOGY

To be included in our survey, public health researchers had to have published at least one English-language empirical study on firearms in a peer-reviewed academic journal between January 2000 and December 2018. Our sample of criminologists and economists was taken from lists that we had compiled for our previous survey; they had to have published at least one empirical study on firearms and violence in a peer-reviewed criminology journal (excluding forensics or injury publications) between January 2000 and December 2014.

We used the web-based tool Survey Gizmo to gather our respondents' views on the effectiveness of several different policies related to gun violence, including 20 policies evaluated in the *Times* survey. Respondents typically needed 3–5 minutes to complete the survey. All participants were told that they were selected because of their expertise in firearms research and they were asked not to participate if they did not consider themselves to be experts in this area.

One of us, Gary Mauser of Simon Fraser University, handled the surveying of the criminologists and economists. Respondents were directed to contact him with any questions, comments, or concerns they might have. Another of us, Arthur Berg of Harvard Medical School, handled the survey of public health researchers.

Response rates were acceptable. We had an overall response rate of 43.3% (120 responses out of 277 valid emails). The response rate for criminologists was 63% (38 out of 60), and 74% for economists (32 out of 43). The response rate for public health researchers was lower, just 30% (50 out of 167). This may be due in part to the higher number of co-authors on public health publications, but we sent out the survey seven times to public health researchers to get the response rate up to 30%.

Our three groups of experts were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of 33 gun-related policies in reducing both murder

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rates and mass public shootings. In contrast with the *New York Times* study, we focused on "murder rates" rather than "firearm homicide deaths." We did this out of concern that, under stricter gun laws, murderers might simply substitute other killing instruments, leaving homicide rates unaffected. Neither the *Times* nor this study investigated the effect of gun policy on suicide rates, which account for more gun deaths than homicides each year.

Twenty of the policies evaluated in our survey were also included in the *New York Times* survey and involved government restrictions on civilian use and ownership of firearms. We also asked for evaluations of five additional restrictive policies. We then asked respondents to evaluate eight policies that would relax or eliminate governmental restrictions related to firearms, such as expansion of personal carry. We did this in order to discover how experts would evaluate policies that encourage individual freedom and self-help. One question was about legalizing recreational drugs "to eliminate drug gangs as a major source of illegal guns."

Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of each policy on a scale of 1–10. A rating of "1" indicated not effective at all and "10" indicated extremely effective.

We attempted to survey some non-Americans among our experts to see if they would have a different perspective than their peers. Unfortunately, the response rate from this group was very small; only four non-American economists, four non-American criminologist, and three non-American public health researchers responded. In our results below, we include the non-Americans' responses, though we also note the American-only responses. (The *Times* respondents were all Americans.)

SURVEY RESULTS

Our survey results appear in Table 1. A casual glance at the table shows some similarities, but also important differences between American academics in the three disciplines.

Criminologists and economists differed somewhat in just how effective they thought various policies would be, but they had similar *rankings* of the policies' effectiveness. Both groups had the same top four preferred policies for stopping mass public shootings. American criminologists rated the following policies most highly: allow K–12 teachers to carry concealed handguns (with a survey score of 6.0), allow military personnel to carry on military bases (5.6), encourage the elimination of gun-free zones (5.3), and relax federal regulations that pressure companies to create gun-free zones (5.0). The top four policies for economists were the same, but in different order: encourage the elimination of gun-free zones (7.9), relax federal regulations that pressure companies to create gun-free zones (7.8), allow K–12 teachers to carry concealed handguns (7.7), and allow military personnel to carry on military bases (7.7).

By contrast, public health researchers placed those policies

TABLE 1

What Different "Expert" Panels Say about Gun Policies

Proposal effectiveness rates on 1–10 scale, from ineffective to extremely effective

EFFECTIVENESS AT REDUCING MURDER RATE									
Policy proposals surveyed by the *New York Times*	*NYT* PANELISTS	OUR RESPONDENTS							
		Criminologists		Economists		Public Health Researchers		Total	
		All respondents	American respondents	All respondents	American respondents	All respondents	American respondents	All respondents	American respondents
Assault weapons ban	5.00	1.71	1.71	2.25	1.57	3.88	4.06	2.76	2.70
Banning the sale and ownership of all ammunition magazines with a capacity greater than 10 bullets	5.80	1.81	1.81	1.75	1.36	3.96	4.15	2.69	2.72
Bar sales to convicted stalkers	6.50	4.92	5.13	3.13	2.63	6.00	6.12	4.89	4.92
Bar sales to people deemed dangerous by a mental health provider	6.00	4.81	5.13	2.48	2.11	5.35	5.52	4.41	4.53
Implementing a national "buy-back" program for all banned firearms and magazines, where the government pays people to turn in illegal guns	3.90	1.65	1.59	1.94	1.50	5.29	5.62	3.24	3.32
Limiting the amount of ammunition you can purchase within a given time period	4.40	1.91	1.93	2.17	1.24	4.77	5.05	3.17	3.12
One gun a month purchase limit	4.80	2.21	2.33	1.94	1.50	4.36	4.61	3.04	3.11
Preventing sales of all firearms to people who have been convicted of violent misdemeanors	7.10	4.34	4.47	2.75	2.29	7.15	7.33	5.09	5.16
Requiring a mandatory waiting period of three days after gun is purchased before it can be taken home	4.80	3.38	3.53	2.23	1.74	5.42	5.71	3.92	4.03
Requiring all gun owners to possess a license for their firearm	6.40	3.06	3.13	2.48	1.74	5.50	5.80	3.92	3.94
Requiring all gun owners to register their fingerprints	5.00	2.20	2.25	2.31	1.79	4.57	4.81	3.22	3.25
Requiring all guns to microstamp each bullet with a mark that uniquely matches the gun and bullet	5.50	2.49	2.56	2.44	1.93	4.26	4.49	3.21	3.24
Requiring report of lost or stolen guns	6.00	2.69	2.75	2.29	1.74	5.00	5.27	3.55	3.59
Requiring that all firearms be recorded in a national registry	5.70	2.06	2.07	2.16	1.44	5.52	5.84	3.53	3.55
Requiring that all gun buyers demonstrate a "genuine need" for a gun, such as a law enforcement job or hunting	5.60	2.42	2.38	2.19	1.36	4.66	4.91	3.29	3.22
Requiring that all gun owners store their guns in a safe storage unit	4.40	2.91	2.94	2.06	1.57	4.79	5.04	3.47	3.51
Requiring that gun buyers complete safety training and a test for their specific firearm	4.10	1.42	1.47	2.53	2.15	4.32	4.56	2.93	2.99
Semiautomatic gun ban	6.10	1.87	1.88	2.44	1.79	4.04	4.23	2.93	2.88
Universal background checks (Checks on private transfers) for ammo buyers	6.40	2.26	2.19	1.84	1.30	5.47	5.77	3.48	3.53
Universal background checks (Checks on private transfers) for gun buyers	7.30	3.03	3.00	2.03	1.37	5.63	5.91	3.85	3.86
Average	5.54	2.66	2.71	2.27	1.71	5.00	5.24	3.53	3.56

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Five additional restrictive policies									
Allow judges to take away a person's guns based on "probable cause" that a person might commit a crime		2.89	2.94	2.13	1.86	4.76	4.91	3.47	3.52
Allow judges to take away a person's guns based on the "Preponderance of the evidence" that a person might commit a crime		3.08	3.13	2.25	1.93	5.15	5.27	3.72	3.76
Allow judges to take away a person's guns without a hearing		2.16	2.18	2.00	1.71	4.09	4.30	2.92	2.99
Allow judges to take away a person's guns without requiring testimony by mental health experts		2.47	2.53	2.19	1.86	4.22	4.44	3.12	3.19
Requiring all gun owners to provide login information for their social media accounts		1.58	1.64	1.32	1.15	2.52	2.64	1.90	1.95
Average for these five questions		2.44	2.48	1.98	1.70	4.15	4.31	3.03	3.08
Average for first 25 questions		2.61	2.67	2.21	1.70	4.83	5.05	3.43	3.46
Eight policies that would reduce government restrictions									
Allow teachers with permits to carry concealed handguns at K–12 schools and college campuses		4.44	4.79	6.64	6.62	2.44	2.03	4.19	4.05
Allow military personnel at military bases to carry guns		4.61	4.86	6.87	6.93	2.66	2.24	4.40	4.24
Authorizing "stand-your-ground" laws nationally that allow people to defend themselves using lethal force without requiring a person to first retreat as far as possible		3.21	2.93	4.20	4.43	2.13	1.52	3.02	2.70
Encouraging public places to eliminate gun-free zones for concealed handgun permit holders		4.94	5.00	6.93	7.00	2.74	2.19	4.55	4.28
Legalizing drugs to eliminate drug gangs as a major source of illegal guns		4.12	4.07	6.27	6.64	3.19	2.69	4.30	4.12
National reciprocity for permitted concealed handguns		4.28	4.50	7.00	7.07	3.03	2.62	4.48	4.33
Reducing the government-imposed costs of acquiring guns in terms of background checks, licensing fees, and costs of concealed handgun permits.		5.15	5.20	6.67	7.07	4.05	4.14	5.10	5.22
Relaxing federal restrictions to let companies determine if people can carry concealed handguns in workplace settings		4.85	4.87	7.00	7.14	4.59	4.66	5.31	5.36
Average of less restrictive policies		4.45	4.53	6.45	6.61	3.10	2.76	4.42	4.29

EFFECTIVENESS AT REDUCING MASS PUBLIC SHOOTINGS

Policy proposals surveyed by the *New York Times*	***NYT* PANELISTS**	**OUR RESPONDENTS**							
		Criminologists		**Economists**		**Public Health Researchers**		**Total**	
		All respondents	**American respondents**	**All respondents**	**American respondents**	**All respondents**	**American respondents**	**All respondents**	**American respondents**
Assault weapons ban	6.80	2.92	3.00	3.00	2.00	5.68	5.98	4.09	4.05
Banning the sale and ownership of all ammunition magazines with a capacity greater than 10 bullets	6.80	2.50	2.53	2.56	1.86	5.88	6.19	3.93	3.96
Bar sales to convicted stalkers	6.00	4.03	4.06	2.59	1.96	5.16	5.24	4.11	4.04
Bar sales to people deemed dangerous by a mental health provider	6.30	4.64	4.88	2.74	2.11	6.04	6.26	4.72	4.78
Implementing a national "buy-back" program for all banned firearms and magazines, where the government pays people to turn in illegal guns	3.90	1.54	1.59	1.94	1.50	4.60	4.89	2.92	3.01
Limiting the amount of ammunition you can purchase within a given time period	5.60	2.91	2.94	2.16	1.44	5.27	5.59	3.70	3.71
One gun a month purchase limit	4.70	2.49	2.63	1.81	1.36	4.18	4.41	3.01	3.08
Preventing sales of all firearms to people who have been convicted of violent misdemeanors	6.80	3.19	3.18	2.31	1.79	5.76	5.84	4.03	3.98
Requiring a mandatory waiting period of three days after gun is purchased before it can be taken home	4.70	2.83	2.94	1.90	1.30	4.00	4.21	3.07	3.07

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Policy proposals surveyed by the *New York Times*	NYT PANELISTS	OUR RESPONDENTS							
		Criminologists		Economists		Public Health Researchers		Total	
		All respondents	American respondents	All respondents	American respondents	All respondents	American respondents	All respondents	American respondents
Requiring all gun owners to possess a license for their firearm	5.80	2.73	2.80	2.23	1.52	5.13	5.40	3.59	3.61
Requiring all gun owners to register their fingerprints	4.00	1.74	1.81	1.69	1.21	3.55	3.73	2.48	2.50
Requiring all guns to microstamp each bullet with a mark that uniquely matches the gun and bullet	4.10	1.74	1.81	1.56	1.14	3.24	3.41	2.32	2.34
Requiring report of lost or stolen guns	4.80	2.31	2.44	1.77	1.37	4.13	4.33	2.92	2.99
Requiring that all firearms be recorded in a national registry	5.00	2.03	2.13	1.84	1.15	4.66	4.91	3.07	3.09
Requiring that all gun buyers demonstrate a "genuine need" for a gun, such as a law enforcement job or hunting	5.60	2.22	2.19	2.13	1.36	4.57	4.82	3.18	3.12
Requiring that all gun owners store their guns in a safe storage unit	4.10	1.86	1.94	1.44	1.07	3.65	3.84	2.49	2.55
Requiring that gun buyers complete safety training and a test for their specific firearm	4.00	1.19	1.21	1.75	1.36	3.48	3.67	2.29	2.32
Semiautomatic gun ban	6.80	2.53	2.56	2.81	1.79	5.80	6.11	3.97	3.91
Universal background checks (Checks on private transfers) for ammo buyers	6.50	2.45	2.40	1.90	1.22	5.43	5.73	3.55	3.55
Universal background checks (Checks on private transfers) for gun buyers	6.60	2.74	2.67	1.90	1.22	5.49	5.78	3.66	3.66
Average	5.45	2.53	2.58	2.10	1.49	4.78	5.02	3.35	3.37
Five additional restrictive policies									
Allow judges to take away a person's guns based on "probable cause" that a person might commit a crime		2.69	2.81	2.00	1.71	4.15	4.23	3.12	3.15
Allow judges to take away a person's guns based on the "Preponderance of the evidence" that a person might commit a crime		2.94	3.00	2.13	1.79	4.48	4.56	3.36	3.37
Allow judges to take away a person's guns without a hearing		2.40	2.50	2.06	1.79	3.77	3.98	2.88	2.96
Allow judges to take away a person's guns without requiring testimony by mental health experts		2.40	2.50	2.19	1.86	3.74	3.93	2.90	2.96
Requiring all gun owners to provide login information for their social media accounts		1.90	2.00	1.58	1.37	2.71	2.85	2.16	2.21
Average for these five questions		2.47	2.56	1.99	1.70	3.77	3.91	2.88	2.93
Average for first 25 questions		2.52	2.58	2.08	1.53	4.58	4.80	3.26	3.28
Eight policies that would reduce government restrictions									
Allow teachers with permits to carry concealed handguns at K–12 schools and college campuses		5.78	6.00	7.73	7.71	3.41	2.86	5.31	5.07
Allow military personnel at military bases to carry guns		5.29	5.60	7.73	7.71	3.28	2.86	5.11	4.94
Authorizing "stand-your-ground" laws nationally that allow people to defend themselves using lethal force without requiring a person to first retreat as far as possible		3.00	2.73	3.67	3.86	2.13	1.52	2.81	2.49
Encouraging public places to eliminate gun-free zones for concealed handgun permit holders		5.42	5.33	8.00	7.86	3.28	2.69	5.22	4.82
Legalizing drugs to eliminate drug gangs as a major source of illegal guns		2.48	2.60	4.13	4.57	2.80	2.78	3.05	3.18
National reciprocity for permitted concealed handguns		4.53	4.38	6.93	6.93	3.06	2.48	4.56	4.20
Reducing the government-imposed costs of acquiring guns in terms of background checks, licensing fees, and costs of concealed handgun permits.		4.18	4.13	6.07	6.43	3.72	3.85	4.49	4.59
Relaxing federal restrictions to let companies determine if people can carry concealed handguns in workplace settings		4.83	5.00	7.80	7.79	3.25	2.76	4.96	4.73
Average of less restrictive policies		4.44	4.47	6.51	6.61	3.12	2.73	4.44	4.25

near the bottom of their list. Their top policy choice was barring gun sales to people deemed dangerous by a mental health provider, which was the fifth most valued policy by criminologists (4.88). Public health researchers' other top policies weren't viewed positively by criminologists. The public health researchers' second through fourth top-ranked policies were banning magazines that can hold more than 10 bullets (6.2), banning semi-automatic guns (6.1), and prohibiting assault weapon (5.98). All of these policies involve highly restrictive bans. For criminologists, these were their 21st (2.6), 20th (2.8), and 10th (3.0) ranked policies. There was an even larger gap between economists and public health researchers.

The Spearman correlation coefficients confirm these patterns and provide a systematic way for us to compare the policy rankings of each field. A coefficient of 1 means that the two disciplines have exactly the same policy rankings; a value of –1 indicates that they have the exact opposite rankings, and zero means that there is no relationship. Criminologists and economists have a Spearman correlation of 0.775. That is statistically significant at better than the 0.0001% level, implying that the two groups have similar policy rankings. By contrast, the Spearman correlations comparing either criminologists or economists to public health researchers are negative, –0.068 and –0.154 respectively, indicating that criminologists and economists are slightly more likely than not to have the opposite policy rankings of public health researchers. The difference between economists and public health researchers comes closest to being statistically significant, with an 11% level of significance.

The patterns are similar for the different groups' ratings of the effectiveness of policies at reducing murder rates. While the proposal ranked most favorably by criminologists is reducing government-imposed costs of acquiring guns (5.2), economists wanted to relax federal restrictions that interfere with companies setting rules for people having guns (7.1) and public health researchers wanted to prevent the sales of a firearm to people convicted of violent misdemeanors (7.3).

The Spearman coefficients again show the policy rankings of criminologists and economists to be very similar, with a coefficient of 0.730, which is statistically significant at better than the 0.0001% level. The coefficient for public health researchers and criminologists is –0.003, and –0.380 for public health researchers and economists. The latter relationship is statistically significant at the 0.03% level. The three groups of researchers are all statistically different from each other in their policy rankings.

OUR PANELISTS AND THE *TIMES* PANELISTS

To determine whether the *New York Times* panel was representative of academic experts, we compared their answers with those of our survey respondents using the 20 common questions in the two surveys. As shown in Table 2, not even our public health respondents evaluated gun control proposals as favorably as did the *Times* panel, though they came by far the closest. On the subject of effectiveness of gun control policies on murder rates, there is no statistically significant difference between the public health respondents and the *Times*' panel.

On these questions, the evaluations of our American researchers are particularly weakly correlated to those obtained by the *New York Times*. The one exception is our public health researchers; their high level of agreement suggests that the *Times* panel was composed primarily of public health professionals, with only a sprinkling of experts from other disciplines.

We again examined the Spearman correlation coefficients,

Table 2

Comparing *NYT* Panel to Our Criminologists, Economists, and Public Health Researchers

Proposal effectiveness rates on 1–10 scale, from ineffective to extremely effective

MURDER RATES: EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATIONS OF 20 COMMON POLICY PROPOSALS (American researchers only)

	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
NYT panelists	3.9	7.3	5.5	0.97
Public health researchers	4.1	7.3	5.2	0.81
Criminologists	1.5	5.1	2.7	1.10
Economists	1.2	2.6	1.7	0.37

Are the means statistically significantly different for a two-tailed *t*-test?

	Probability the mean difference = 0 at
NYT panelists/criminologists	0.001%
NYT panelists/economists	0.001%
NYT panelists/public health researchers	0.152%
Public health researchers/criminologists	0.001%
Public health researchers/economists	0.001%
Criminologists/economists	0.001%

MASS PUBLIC SHOOTINGS: EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATIONS OF 20 COMMON POLICY PROPOSALS (American researchers only)

	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
NYT panelists	3.9	6.8	5.4	1.10
Public health researchers	3.4	6.3	5.0	0.94
Criminologists	1.2	4.9	2.6	0.83
Economists	1.1	2.1	1.5	0.32

Are the means statistically significantly different for a two-tailed *t*-test?

	Probability the mean difference = 0 at
NYT panelists / criminologists	0.001%
NYT panelists / economists	0.001%
NYT panelists / public health researchers	0.001%
Public health researchers / criminologists	0.001%
Public health researchers / economists	0.001%
Criminologists / economists	0.001%

though this time just for the 20 policies surveyed by the *Times*. Our results appear in Table 3. Our criminologists and public health researchers ranked gun policies in a similar way to the *Times*' panel, but our economists diverged from their academic peers on the subject of gun control policies' effectiveness at reducing murder rates.

These results lead us to a couple of conclusions. The *New York Times*' gun policies elicited similar rank orders, except for economists regarding murder rates. But when it came to reducing mass public shooting deaths, criminologists, economists, and even public health researchers were less supportive of restrictions on gun ownership than was the *Times*' panel.

The differences between public health researchers, criminologists, and economists become a lot starker when we consider our survey's broader set of policies, which included queries concerning liberal proposals such as eliminating gun-free zones. Criminologists and economists were not statistically significantly different in terms of their average evaluations of proposals or how they rank-ordered the proposals. Economists appear to be a lot more supportive of abolishing gun-free zones than criminologists are, but they will generally provide the same policy rankings.

The *New York Times* also commissioned a survey by the *Morning Consult* of 1,975 registered voters over June 17–20, 2016 to assess their opinions of the same policies. Surprisingly, there is no correlation between how registered voters ranked the effectiveness of different gun control regulations and how either the *Times*' experts or any of the groups of experts in our sample ranked them. Indeed, if one believes that any group of experts has properly ranked the effectiveness of different gun control regulations, registered voters have ordered the effectiveness of regulations entirely randomly.

Table 3

Spearman Correlation Coefficients: Average evaluation of each of our survey groups and the *NYT* panel on 20 policy proposals

American researchers

REDUCING MURDER RATES		
	Spearman Correlation	H: $r = 0$ [2-tail]
NYT panelists / criminologists	0.0532	$p < 0.02$
NYT panelists / economists	0.1670	$p < 0.48$
NYT panelists / public health researchers	0.4979	$p < 0.03$
Public health researchers / criminologists	0.0613	$p < 0.01$
Public health researchers / economists	0.0822	$p < 0.73$
Criminologists / economists	0.4021	$p < 0.08$

REDUCING MASS PUBLIC SHOOTINGS		
	Spearman Correlation	H: $r = 0$ [2-tail]
NYT panelists/criminologists	0.6755	$p < 0.001$
NYT panelists/economists	0.5841	$p < 0.007$
NYT panelists/public health researchers	0.8881	$p < 0.001$
Public health researchers/criminologists	0.6486	$p < 0.001$
Public health researchers/economists	0.7061	$p < 0.001$
Criminologists/economists	0.06554	$p < 0.002$

Table 4

Summary Statistics on Our Respondents' Views

Proposal effectiveness rates on 1–10 scale

	Increasing Restrictions		Reducing Restrictions	
	All Respondents	American Respondents	All Respondents	American Respondents
Criminologists	2.57	2.62	4.44	4.50
Economists	2.15	1.62	6.48	6.61
Public Health Researchers	4.70	4.92	3.11	2.74

NOTE: All sample comparisons are significantly different using single-tail *t*-tests (significant at $p < 0.001$).

EVALUATING POLICIES THAT RESTRICT OR RELAX GOVERNMENTAL RESTRICTIONS

Our panelists were asked to evaluate two starkly different types of policy proposals: those that increase governmental restrictions and those that relax or loosen restrictions. The differences between the experts' evaluations are especially pronounced when they were asked to consider these two types of policy proposals (increasing or decreasing government restrictions).

Differences between the groups of experts are muted because evaluations of both restrictive and liberalized proposals are combined. Table 4 compares the three groups' evaluations. Given the nearly identical evaluations of the policies' effects on "murder rates" and "mass public shootings" by each group, these two dependent variables are combined.

The differences between economists and public health academics are especially pronounced when it comes to liberalized proposals. Criminologists remained moderate on both types of policy proposals. Public health researchers rated restrictive gun control policies as being much more effective than did either of the other two groups of experts. In contrast, economists and criminologists were more skeptical of the effectiveness of restrictive gun control policies (e.g., banning assault weapons). Economists were the most skeptical of all.

The rankings reverse dramatically when it comes to liberalized policy proposals (e.g., "Allow teachers with permits to carry concealed handguns at K–12 schools and college campuses"). On these policies, public health researchers were the most skeptical and economists and criminologists were less skeptical about effectiveness. Economists clearly gave the highest evaluations for the effectiveness of liberalized policies at reducing firearms violence.

COMPARING BROAD CATEGORIES OF REGULATIONS

The policy proposals we examined fall into many different categories of regulations. The most obvious are: "red flag" laws

TABLE 5

Our Respondents' Evaluations of Various Types of Proposals

Proposal effectiveness rates on 1–10 scale

EFFECTIVENESS AT REDUCING MURDER RATE				
	NYT Panelists	Our Respondents		
		Criminologists	Economists	Public Health Professionals
Red flag laws		2.7	1.8	4.7
Various bans on weapons or magazines	5.2	1.7	1.6	4.5
Universal background checks	6.9	2.6	1.3	5.8
Licensing and registration	5.4	2.3	1.7	5.1
Gun-free zones		4.9	6.9	2.8

EFFECTIVENESS AT REDUCING MASS PUBLIC SHOOTINGS				
	NYT Panelists	Our Respondents		
		Criminologists	Economists	Public Health Professionals
Red flag laws		2.7	1.8	4.2
Various bans on weapons or magazines	6.1	2.4	1.8	5.8
Universal background checks	6.6	2.5	1.2	5.8
Licensing and registration	4.8	2	1.3	4.3
Gun-free zones		5.5	7.8	2.8

(which allow courts to temporarily confiscate weapons from a person based on probable cause the person might commit a crime), gun and ammunition bans, universal background checks, licensing and registration, and gun-free zones. Table 5 lists these broad categories.

The patterns we've already observed remain very similar when we look at academics' assessments of each category. The *New York Times* asked its panel about three of these regulatory categories and their experts assessed them more positively than did any of our surveyed groups. Again, our public health researchers came the closest to the *Times*' experts. Criminologists were more skeptical of these laws, and economists were the most skeptical of all.

On the 1–10 scale used in our survey, public health researchers were approximately in the middle of the scale for each of the first four categories of regulations. Criminologists' average response was around 2 and economists averaged between 1 and 2. The pattern is reversed for the fifth proposal category, eliminating gun-free zones. On that issue, economists were the most supportive.

CONCLUSION

Hundreds of millions of dollars are being put into public health research on gun control. Between 2015 and 2018, the federal government invested $43.2 million in firearms research, with 89% coming from the National Institute of Health. Congressional Democrats are pushing to include $50 million in Centers for Disease Control funding for additional gun research in the next federal budget. Some state governments are also putting millions of dollars into firearms research that consists exclusively of public health studies. Even larger amounts of funding are going to public health researchers from private sources. Yet the disparity in answers from our public health researchers on one hand, and our criminologists and economists on the other, raises questions about devoting so much money to public health research into guns.

Academics from different fields vary widely in their views on the effectiveness of gun control. Our results indicate that public health researchers are much more supportive of gun control than are either criminologists or economists. They are also much more opposed to deregulation. Economists, by contrast, are the most skeptical of new regulations and the most supportive of deregulation. The different groups of researchers also provide very different rankings of effectiveness when asked to rate different policies.

The differences between the *New York Times* and our own respondents appear to arise for several reasons. The *Times*' consideration of only policies that would increase government regulation of gun ownership and the apparent dominance of public health researchers on its panel both worked to produce answers that were more sympathetic to gun control policies. However, this does not explain all of the differences between our survey results and theirs, as the *Times*' small selective sample was even slightly more supportive of gun control than was the average public health researcher in our survey. That is true even when we limit ourselves to just the *Times*' surveyed policies. *R*

READINGS

- "Counterpoint: Reducing Firearm Violence: Why a Public Health Approach Is Helpful," by David Hemenway and Matthew Miller. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 38(3): 795–801 (2019).
- "How to Prevent Gun Deaths? Where Experts and the Public Agree," by Quoctrung Bui and Margot Sanger-Katz. *New York Times*, January 10, 2017.
- "How to Reduce Mass Shooting Deaths? Experts Rank Gun Laws," by Margot Sanger-Katz and Quoctrung Bui. *New York Times*, October 5, 2017.
- *More Guns, Less Crime*, 3rd ed., by John R. Lott Jr. University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- "New Jersey Looks to California for Gun-Violence Research Model," by Lilo H. Stainton. *NJ Spotlight*, April 3, 2018.
- "The Myth of the Lack of Public Health Research on Firearms," by John R. Lott Jr. Testimony before the Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies, United States House of Representatives, March 7, 2019.
- "Understanding Gun Violence: The Contribution of a Public Health Framework," by Paul Decker. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 38(3): 787–794 (2019).