The Effect of Education on Attitudes Toward Gun Control

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Research Questions
- Does one’s level of education affect one’s attitude toward gun control?
- Does the association vary by age?

Significance
- Since the school shooting at Parkland High School, gun control has been a major focus in our country. Millions have been pushing for Congress to take action on gun control. Studies like this one can give us a better idea of who is pushing for gun control (Reuters, 2018).

Background
- Gun owners and crime victims may be less likely to support gun control (Wolpert & Gimpel, 1998).
- Republicans are less likely than Democrats to support gun control (Pearson-Merkowitz & Dyck, 2017).
- Americans with higher education are more likely to identify as Democrats and less likely to be crime victims (Wolpert & Gimpel, 1998).
- Higher education is related to support for gun control (Kleck, 1996).
- No differences by age (Wolpert & Gimpel, 1998).

Hypothesis
- Higher levels of education will increase the likelihood of a positive attitude toward gun control. This result will not vary based on age.

Data and Sample
- General Social Survey 2016 (N=2,867)
- American adults 18 and older living in non-institutionalized households.

Dependent Measure
- **Attitude Toward Gun Control**
- “Would you favor or oppose a law which would require a person to obtain a police permit before he or she could buy a gun?”

Independent Measure
- **Education Level**
- What is the highest grade in school that you finished and got credit for?

Control Measure
- **Age**
- How old are you?

Analysis
- Cross tabulation and Chi-square test using SPSS

Results
- Figure 1.
  - % Favor Gun Control by Education Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Favor</th>
<th>Oppose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>27.70%</td>
<td>72.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>36.30%</td>
<td>63.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>31.20%</td>
<td>68.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree or Higher</td>
<td>22.50%</td>
<td>77.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Figure 2.
  - % Favor Gun Control by Education Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Favor</th>
<th>Oppose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>69.6%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree or Higher</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Chi-square test is significant for those under 50 at p < 0.05.

Summary of Findings
- For those under 50, education level does not have a significant effect on attitudes toward gun control.
- For those over 50, a higher education level is significantly related to attitudes toward gun control: the higher the education level, the more likely they are to favor gun control.

Future Research
- Break up age groups even more: 18-30, 31-50, and over fifty. This could show more of a cohort effect.
- Control for base knowledge on gun control: thoroughly explain gun control in a neutral way and then have a survey follow. This could control for lack of a general knowledge on the topic. Some people may report attitudes toward gun control without understanding what it actually means.

References