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Case Study: Norway's Gun Violence Correlation

By: Bailey Hackenberry

Introduction:

It is commonly accepted in academic literature that there is a correlation between a high gun ownership rate and high gun violence, or death rates, in a country. This theory is summarized by an article written in *"Epidemiologic Reviews,"* a leading review journal of public health, which states, "...specific restrictions on purchase, access, and use of firearms are associated with reductions in firearm deaths" (Santaella-Tenorio, Villaveces, Galea, & Cerdá, 2010); however, there is one outlier of the theory. The case of Norway has the independent variable of this theory, in a sense that there is a high rate of gun ownership; however, Norway doesn't have the expected outcome of high gun violence that should happen if this theory were to be true. Since the case is an outlier in this theory, it is a most likely case; there are the traits described in the theory without the expected outcome. There can be a coincidental correlation between two things; there may be other independent variables that are the cause of the event. In this case, a high rate of gun violence, or deaths, (the dependent variable) isn't caused by the high rate of gun ownership (the independent variable). This shows that although Norway has a high gun ownership rate, it does not have a high gun violence rate. This is due to primarily three underlying independent variables: the Norwegian culture, citizen/government relationship, and education.

Description of Theory:

The theory being tested is that there is a correlation between high gun ownership rates and high gun violence, or death, rates in a country. This theory is concluded in several ways by different scholars who claim similar correlations all of which can be generalized as high gun ownership, or availability, correlates to a high rate of gun deaths.

Adam Lankford, Ph.D., a professor of criminology at The University of Alabama, conducted a study entitled, “*Public Mass Shooters and Firearms: A Cross-National Study of 171 Countries*”. Through this study, he concluded that “nations with high firearm ownership rates may be particularly susceptible to future public mass shootings, even if they are relatively peaceful or mentally healthy according to other national indicators” (Lankford, 2016). Lankford’s study also acknowledged that mass shootings and other methods of murder are different in several ways. Public mass shootings are often caused by mental illness and are pre-meditated, as opposed to being crimes of passion, and often target strangers instead of individuals who are known to the shooter (Lankford, 2016). The only constant variable in the 171 countries studied by Lankford is “that firearm ownership rates appeared to be a statistically significant predictor of the distribution of public mass shooters worldwide” (Lankford, 2016).

One type of gun-violence is known as a homicide-suicide; this occurs when there is a murder of either one or several individuals followed by the perpetrator committing suicide (Panczak, et al., 2013). One study concludes that “...there was a strong correlation between the proportion of homicide-suicides involving firearms and the proportion of household owning at least one firearm in the country” (Panczak, et al., 2013). Thus, a higher proportion of gun ownership correlates with the homicides-suicides in a particular country.

There are more types of firearm deaths around the world than just mass shootings and homicide-suicides. According to NPR, “Mass shootings represent a small share of total... firearm homicides” (Peralta, 2013). Homicides are generally the highest proportion of gun deaths in a country. A study of homicide rates in the United States between 1981-2010 have concluded that “Gun ownership was a significant predictor of firearm homicide rates” and ultimately “...observed a robust correlation between higher levels of gun ownership and higher firearm homicide rates” (Siegel, Ross, & King, 2013). This same study also revealed that “...for each percentage point increase in gun ownership, the firearm homicide rate increased by 0.9%.” (Siegel, Ross, & King, 2013).

Suicide is also another form of firearm death; “Research has revealed a direct correlation between firearm availability and suicide risk” and even shows that a household with guns is five times more likely to experience a suicide (Melamed, Bauer, Kalian, Rosca, & Mester, 2011). Researchers from around the United States reviewed over 130 studies from 10 countries worldwide about gun control. The study looked at a wide array of gun control from around the world and each time they found that “Reducing access to guns was followed by a drop in deaths related to guns” (Lopez, 2017).

After all of the studies, reviews, and evaluations of several countries and cases, all the evidence seems to point to one universal observation: “there [is] a significant positive correlation between guns per capita per country and the rate of firearm-related deaths” (Bangalore & Messerli, 2013). Thus, the independent variable of this theory is the gun ownership rate and the dependent variable is the rate of gun deaths.

Justification of Case:

The case of which the theory that there is a correlation between high gun ownership rates and high gun death rates in a country is being tested in Norway. Norway is a most likely case for this theory because it has high gun ownership rates but a low level of gun violence when compared to other countries with similar gun ownership rates. For example, Norway has 0.5 more guns per capita than Canada, but Canada's gun homicide rates are almost 4 times as high as Norway's. The Council on Foreign Relations states that "Though Norway ranked tenth worldwide in gun ownership, according to the Small Arms Survey, it placed near the bottom in gun homicide rates. (The U.S. rate is roughly sixty-four times higher.)" (Masters J. , 2017).

Since the case of Norway doesn't fit in the theory that there is a correlation between high gun ownership rates and gun death rates, it makes it a most likely case. Norway has the variable of high gun ownership that is supposedly needed for the theory to be true; however, Norway doesn't have the dependent variable of high gun death rates as a result of the high ownership rate. The fact alone that there are over 30 guns per 100 capita, totaling over 1.3 million legally owned guns, and ultimately rank 10th in the world for gun ownership per capita proves that Norway would be considered a case in which the independent variable of having a lot of guns is present (theNorwegianamerican, 2017), (Masters J. , 2017).

Norway clearly has the independent variable of a high gun ownership rate; however, Norway's gun deaths aren't even half of their total deaths, as other countries with ownership rates as high as Norway's are. (Evoy & Hideg, 2017). Although there is a high gun ownership rate, Norway hasn't experienced a significant number of gun deaths. Norway has one of the lowest homicide per-capita rates in Europe (The Law Library of Congress, 2015).

To be put succinctly, Norway has enough guns to be

considered a country for this theory to be tested. The outcome of Norway's case is surprising, relative to what is known about why the event of high gun deaths occurs, according to the theory that high gun ownership correlates with high gun death rates in a country.

Analysis:

Norway does encounter some gun deaths however, as no country is immune to gun violence. In 2010, Norway did have 18 unintentional gun deaths per one million people; however, there were zero homicides in Norway. In the same year, Sweden had 2 homicides per one million people and Canada had 5 homicides per one million people (Fox, 2018). Sweden and Canada both have gun ownership rates of which are comparable with Norway's. In July of 2011, 69 Norwegians were killed in a mass shooting by Anders Breivik (Ofman, 2016). This attack in Norway was a fluke and will most likely not be duplicated. This instance is the only occurrence of a Norwegian mass shooting, and it was not only a shooting but was only a part of a bigger terrorist attack. The Norwegian government is so confident in these claims that it will not happen again, that there were zero changes to Norway's gun laws after this attack (Ofman, 2016).

The Norwegian gun laws aren't unlike many other countries around the world, especially other countries with similar ownership rates. While gun laws don't have an impact on mass shootings or gun-related crimes, it is still important to recognize that Norwegian gun laws are fairly similar to the laws of other countries (Lopez, 2017) (Lovdata, 2016). In Norway, you must be 18 years old to buy a rifle or shotgun and 21 to buy a handgun (Lovdata, 2016). This is identical to the United States due to the Gun Control Act (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015). Norway also requires a weapons card, special permission to own a firearm (Lovdata, 2016). Other countries, such as the United Kingdom, require a special permit for certain guns in their

country as well (Masters J. , 2016). To receive a weapons card in Norway citizens must go through a background check process; countries who required a background check saw a suicide rate 27% lower than without the background checks (Sumner, Layde, & Guse, 2008). In Norway, weapons cards, as well as the firearms themselves, may be confiscated if the local police chief deems the person “not... reliable or if for special reasons he may be considered unfit to have firearms” [*quote was translated via Google translate and some words may have been lost in translation*] (Lovdata, 2016). Australia and the United Kingdom have both implemented similar policies, as they buy back assault weapons from their citizens in an attempt to get them out of the hands of people who aren't fit to own them (Masters J. , 2016). Norwegian law also goes a step further than other countries; Norway allows citizens holding weapon cards to loan a firearm to someone else for up to 4 weeks (Masters J. , 2016). The gun laws of Norway are equally as restrictive as other countries around the world, many of which have ownership rates similar to the rates in Norway. Gun laws are an important variable in this case; however, are not the reason for Norway's low gun death rate.

There are three main independent variables present in Norway that are the reasons for the dependent variable of gun violence to be missing in this case: *Norwegian Culture*, *Norwegian relation with the government*, and *Norwegian education*.

Norwegian Culture:

The lifestyle and culture of Norway are unique from many other countries around the world. According to Willy Røgneberg, the owner of the largest Norwegian gun shop, “In Norway, we've always had lots of guns, as we have a hunting culture. Most people in Norway respect weapons and view them sensibly” (theNorwegianamerican, 2017). To say that Norway

has a lot of guns is an understatement; Norway has 1,329,000 guns registered to private owners, most of these guns are used for sport. Nearly half a million people, or about one-tenth of the population of Norway, are registered hunters. A large number of hunters and sports shooters are the reason that the number of firearms is not only high but also growing. Hunters are beginning to specialize the types of guns they use for different types of game as opposed to using the same gun for everything (theNorwegianamerican, 2017). Norway not only has a large percentage of the population that owns guns, relative to the rest of the world but it also “has had a 45% increase in firearm use from 2005-10 to 2011-16” (Evoy & Hideg, 2017).

To put Norway’s culture in perspective with the rest of the world, 6 of the countries with more guns per capita than Norway have either a high terrorist population or a large black-market for guns (Reuuters, 2016). The culture of terrorist ridden countries with prevalent black markets is very different from Norway’s. The Norwegian culture is generally less hostile and based on close relationships.

Citizen/Government Relation:

Norwegian citizens are more respectful of the government’s authority and likewise, the government doesn’t use coercion as frequently while prosecuting criminals. This is due to the findings of Gummi Oddsson, a sociologist at Northern Michigan University. Oddsson found that Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, and Norway) make extreme efforts to build trust in local communities around their respective countries (Weller, 2018). There is an important reason for this effort of building trust, as “Economists say that... Trust means that high-quality people join the civil service. Citizens pay their taxes and play by the rules. Government decisions are widely accepted” (The Economist Newspaper Limited, 2013). In effect, this has led to the number of gun deaths caused by the

Norwegian police in the past nine years to still be less than the number of gun deaths by American police in one single day (Weller, 2018). The culture in Norway is based on the close relationship between localities and the government. Once the trust between the government and locality is built, it creates a stronger relationship and allows citizens to feel safer around the police, who in turn, have a better understanding of what is happening in the communities.

Norwegian Education:

The Norwegian education system is one of the best in the world; this is reflected in their ranking in the Human Development Index (HDI). Norway was given the top score in overall Human Development, which measures the life expectancy, expected years of schooling, mean years of schooling, and gross national income per capita. Norway is ranked 8th globally for the number of expected years of schooling as well as 8th for the mean years of schooling (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). Norwegians are not only educated in the classroom but they are also educated in gun safety.

As previously stated, Norwegians need to obtain a weapons card; before someone can obtain a weapons card, they must either have a hunting license or sports shooting license. A hunting license requires the completion of a nine-session, 30-hour course; a sports shooting license requires a firearm safety course of at least 9 hours (theNorwegianamerican, 2017). These requirements aren't challenging for Norwegians, as hunting and sports shooting is a large part of Norwegian culture.

Description of Lessons to be Learned:

A lot can be learned from testing the case of Norway in the universal theory that there is a correlation between high gun ownership rates and high gun death rates in a country. Norway is

a most likely case, for this theory, due to its high levels of gun ownership. Norway has high gun ownership rates, as well as similar restriction policies and laws to other countries. The Norwegian culture, citizen/government relation, and education are the three reasons why gun violence rates are so low. Since there are not high rates of death or gun violence in Norway and there is a high gun ownership rate, the theory should be revised. The theory could state that there is a correlation between high gun ownership rates and high gun violence in countries with a negative cultural connotation towards guns, little to no citizen/government relation, as well as low levels of gun education. These three variables are the reasons that Norway has extremely low levels of gun violence.

Simply having a high gun ownership rate alone isn't enough to create a high gun-death rate. There must be some kind of cultural bias towards guns, a toxic relationship between the government and its citizens, or lack of education that determines what gun death rates are truly correlated with. To conclude, there is not always, as in Norway's case, a correlation between high gun ownership rates and high gun death rates in a country.

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