

AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEELING OF SECURITY AND
ACCESS TO GUNS AMONG BRAZILIANS LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

Even after the 2005 Brazilian Firearms Referendum resulting in half of the population voting against gun control, Brazil has demonstrated a difficult environment for gun acquisition. Since the USA has a culture of firearms and has received thousands of Brazilian immigrants in past years, this study has the goal to identify what the perspectives of Brazilians living in the USA are toward gun acquisition. Eight people were interviewed in order to understand if easy firearms access motivates migration to the US, if feeling of security is one of the reasons for Brazilians to migrate, and if easy access to guns promotes a safer environment. The results of this study identified that Brazilians living in the USA believe there is no relationship between feeling of security and access to guns. The feeling of security was related to income distribution, education, and an environment with strong criminal legislation.

INTRODUCTION

The gun control discussion in Brazil started after the country was named number one in firearm deaths in the world by the United Nations in 1996 (Soltis, 2018). As an outcome, Congress had enough votes to pass the Disarmament Statute in 2003, and Brazil started to have a bureaucratic gun acquisition environment (Malta et al., 2020). Two years later, the Senate allowed the public to vote on the Brazilian Firearms and Ammunition Referendum; however 64% of the population voted against gun control (Souza et al., 2014). Even though Brazil's president decided to soften gun ownership regulations in 2019 (Meyer, 2021), people continue struggling to have gun access since firearm carry still follows the Disarmament Statute law, which creates obstacles to gun ownership (Carotti, 2021).

In contrast, Cook and Goss (2014) argue how easy it is for citizens to have firearms in the USA even though gun regulations vary among states. Some states require ownership or carry permit for gun purchase with an official dealer. In other states, the citizens need to be approved only by a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) background check which is quick and shows an average of 1.5% refused applications across the country in the last few years. A gun acquisition gets even easier when it is made with a private seller since the transaction is only regulated in one third of the states and background check or a license is not required in a majority of the cases.

Purpose Statement

This study has the purpose to interview Brazilians living in the US in order to analyze their perspectives about gun access since they have had experiences in both the gun control environment in Brazil and easy firearm access environment in the USA. The goal is to

understand if feeling of security is related to access to guns, and if easy access to guns is one of the reasons for Brazilians to migrate to the USA. This study examines three research questions.

RQ1: Is gun access a reason for Brazilians to migrate to the USA?

RQ2: Is the feeling of security one of the reasons for Brazilians to migrate to the USA?

RQ3: Do Brazilians believe that easy access to guns promotes a safer environment?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Even though the majority of citizens were in favor of the 2005 Brazilian Firearms and Ammunition Referendum, the gun debate is still current in Brazil. Soltis (2018) criticizes the lack of empirical information about the referendum and concludes the voting was an outcome against violence and a support for self-defense. However, Cavalcanti (2017) describes numerous factors that could have influenced the referendum voting. For instance, the pro-gun movement invested higher amount of money than anti-gun advocates in propaganda; the referendum question was in a negative way, which confused people; and the Mensalao corruption scandal, which was disclosed months before the voting, took Brazilians' discussion and prejudiced the referendum debate.

After preparing a study focused on the global burden of disease data from 1990 to 2017, Malta et al. (2018) affirm Brazilian states that collected more guns post 2003 Disarmament Act have reduced gun violence. However, in order to observe people's perception, a quantitative study conducted in Brasilia, the capital of Brazil, identified the popular opinion about guns by using social representation methods. A total of one hundred people were randomly contacted and answered a gun-related words questionnaire. As a result, even the majority of responses indicated perception of death, there was a mix of answers regarding feelings of security and endangerment related to firearms (Nonato & Modesto, 2021).

In the United States, the gun discussion seems to be a topic that is far from declining. Pro-gun advocates claim the Second Amendment gives the right to have access to guns. Also, taking away guns from the citizens will increase criminality since criminals will have the opportunity to easily act without any quick response from the victims. On the other hand, anti-gun advocates blame easy access to guns for mass shootings and homicides in the country.

More guns is directly related to more violence in their perspective (Issues & Controversies, 2021).

Gius (2021) brings controversial points to the gun violence and access to firearms discussion in his investigation in the US. The author demonstrates that killers use other types of weapons such as knives, poison or explosives to commit the crime, and in suicide cases, the individual can use another mean to achieve his goal if there is no firearm access. Moreover, since the FBI depends on states and regional agencies to report crime data, criminality information is not precise. In some cases, data is reported incomplete, inaccurate or even not reported. The fragility of crime data does not support the claim that citizen gun access increases gun violence.

With vast academic studies available in the USA regarding this topic, it is possible to analyze the American popular perception towards guns. For instance, Angelis, Benz, and Gillham (2017) conducted an empirical study at an University Campus in the Western USA examining the relation among support for concealed carry and feeling of insecurity. A total of 1,170 employees answered numerous questions involving level of trust in the government and in the police, feeling of security at the university and in the neighborhood, political affiliation, trust in persons, time spent on the TV weekly, frequency of attendance to church, and other variables. As a result, concealed carry support is extremely associated with low level of trust in the police and government, demographic components and political side.

In the context where women violence has been repeatedly discussed, Leuenberger et al. (2021) analyzed data from 266 Pennsylvania participants. In order to understand the relationship between feeling of security among women victims of partner violence and gun access, the study measured the facility for surrounding people to have firearms and level of security of the participants regarding the presence of a gun. A combination of violence exposure data and

demographic information such as age, education, ethnicity and poverty, were collected. The author concludes the feeling of fear among women exposed to intimate partner violence is not influenced by having guns around while childhood abuse history impacts it directly.

Kelley (2021) deliberates about gun access among feminists in the USA by analyzing the 2018 Guns in American Life Survey (GALS). Dependent and independent variables were used in a regression analysis predicting gun ownership and carrying and empowerment. Afterwards, the author concludes feminists are likely to be gun advocates and always carry guns since there is a preoccupation with security. In addition, women have a higher feeling of empowerment than men.

Summary

As demonstrated before, the gun debate has been present in Brazil and in the USA. However, the countries have different environments regarding firearms access and it is hard to find a common understanding about whether guns should be available for people when those two distinguished realities are analyzed. This study's objective is interviewing Brazilians living in the US and finding the perception of safety of individuals who have lived in both environments towards firearm ownership and carrying. Also, this study wants to verify if gun access is one of the reasons for Brazilians immigration increasing in recent years in the USA. In the next section, the interviews, findings and results will be discussed.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Participants and data collection

In order to identify lived experiences and opinions regarding the topic of this research, eight Brazilians living in the USA were interviewed between October and November of 2021. A total of seven participants were living in the Chicago,IL area and one living in Boston,MA at the moment of the interviews. Two announcements were made in private Facebook groups of Brazilians living in the USA on purpose to capture participants. After persons demonstrating voluntary desire to participate, all of them received an informed consent containing introduction, purpose of the study, voluntary participation and confidentiality paragraph, procedure description including the interview's recording, and they were asked to give their certificate of consent.

All the eight participants were between 23 and 56 years old while seven were women and one man. The participant's education varied between undergraduate and graduate schools. Moreover, seven interviewees are from the southeast region in Brazil, and one is from the northeast part of the country. While one participant has lived in Boston/MA at the moment of the interview, she had lived in Chicago before, and the other seven participants have lived in the Chicago area including downtown and suburbs.

The interviews, which had an average of 30 minutes of length, were online and separated into two parts. In the beginning, demographic data were collected such as age, scholarly, hometown in Brazil and hometown in the USA. Afterwards, four questions were made for each participant in order to address the research questions. The first question was if the participants had knowledge about the 2005 Brazilian Firearm Referendum and its result of 64% against gun control, and what their opinions about it were. In sequence, the participants were asked if security was one of the reasons for them to migrate to the USA and if they felt safe in the

country. Next, how it would be if the participant had access to guns. For the last question, the participants were asked if they believe that easy access to guns promotes a safer environment. In some cases, additional questions were necessary in order to clarify the answers.

The interviews were done in Portuguese, transcribed, and translated to English after. The application Easy Voice Recorder was used to record all interviews. Next, the interviews were transcribed using the website Transcribe by Wreally. Even using an application, some manual alterations were needed after transcription to keep the exact words said by the interviewees. Last, Google Translator was used to translate the interviews from Portuguese to English. Sometimes translations were not accurate and the author made some adjustments as needed.

The next section describes participants' experiences and opinions collected during the interviews. Following ethical principles, the participants' identity will be preserved and fictitious names will be used instead. The participant's reports are separated by interview questions followed by the results section.

Findings

When the participants were asked about the 2005 Brazilian Firearm Referendum, some were not aware about it due to being out of the country or not having a suitable age. Others recalled the debate and the voting in those times. Seven participants answered they would be in the 36% that voted in favor of gun control if they had the opportunity to vote. Increasing the criminality for guns being allowed was the major reason for their opinions.

According to Ana:

I believe that it is linked with more crimes that have happened. Sometimes we watch news showing people that got angry, picked a firearm and killed someone.

Another participant reported:

My opinion against guns became stronger after I arrived in the USA and saw the numerous accidents that happen since firearms are allowed.

William also added:

I believe that firearms should be available just for the government such as police, army, firefighters. Less firearms means less chance of the firearm to be used in a wrong way.

Charlotte added another point to justify her opinion:

I guess the access to guns gives a false security to the owner, except if he is a policeman or some professional who works with a gun.

The unique participant who responded being against gun control explained it is tough for people who live in countryside areas to be safe without firearms access. Even William said he would be in the 36% of the population that had voted in favor of gun control in the 2005 Brazilian Referendum, he added he knows some people who are not gun advocates and would vote in favor of firearms trading since they believe the right of freedom needs to be respected.

When asked if safety was one of the reasons for moving into the USA, six participants answered that safety was not the main reason, yet some of them added they felt safer in the country and decided to stay in America. Some people reported they do not need to stay on alert when they are out. For instance, Jody reported she does not need to “look over shoulder all the time” when she is walking down the street. Ana said she is not afraid to go out and come back later in the night. Moreover, after being a robbery victim numerous times in Brazil, William added he can go out for a walk or a bike ride without any concern regarding safety. Only two participants had safety as the main motivation to migrate to the USA.

However, some participants demonstrated concern with safety in the USA. First, a range of participants agree that the US is not a safe country. For instance, Mary lived in some countries in Europe before moving to the USA and she feels safer there than in the US and Brazil. She demonstrated a desire to go back to Europe in the near future for security reasons. Since Agnes

had never suffered any violence in Brazil and experienced some assaults in Chicago, she reported her feeling of insecurity in the country. Charlotte moved to the Southern side of Chicago after living in a countryside region in Brazil and reported she feels safer in Brazil. Nevertheless, many participants reported there are specific places where violence is present and people should not go. For instance, five participants described the Southern side of Chicago as an area that they avoid due safety issues. William and Joliet experienced going to this area and reported they felt extremely in danger.

Income distribution, criminal legislation and education were added by some participants for what they think could be the reason for the USA having a safer environment than Brazil. Some participants reported that the Criminal law of the USA really works since the criminal suffers the consequences of their actions while in Brazil criminals have some privileges and usually do not stay in jail for a long time. Moreover, it was added that since the USA has a higher level of education, it could contribute to a safer environment.

There was unanimity of answers when the participants were asked how it would be if they have firearms access. All persons responded they would not have a gun if they could. Many reasons were described for their position. It's dangerous to have guns at home when kids are around; a robbery can result in death if the victim reacts with a firearm; many participants said they do not feel safe if they know someone around is carrying a gun; and firearms give a false feeling of security.

Casey reported she would not "have the courage to shoot someone" if a crime happened, and also, she feels concerned that her brother started taking shooting classes and bought a gun to leave in his bedroom in Brazil while living with her parents. According to her:

It could be a tragedy if someone gets into the house and takes his gun knowing it is there, and an accident happens with my parents or him.

William said he feels more comfortable without a gun, especially if a possible criminal knows he is not carrying a firearm, since the chances of a crime resulting in death is lower for the victim.

He said:

One thing that gave me tranquility after being a robbery victim 3 times in Brazil is the criminal knew the chance I had a firearm was very low.

Mary reported she was a kidnap victim in Brazil once before and shared the same feeling as William. She was approached by a group of four criminals and had a gun pointed to her head. If she had a firearm for self-defense, it could end in a tragedy. She said:

I never in my life thought about having a gun. I have no desire. I've been kidnaped before and they put a gun to my head. Even after that, I have not had the desire to have a gun.

Even though Jody already had contact with firearms in the past since her father had one, she said she would not have a gun if she could. However, she said she would have one and take shooting classes if she felt unsafe. She said "I do not feel the need to have a firearm and if I felt the need I would train myself".

Almost all participants gave a negative response when they were asked if they believe that easy gun access promotes a safer environment. In summary, they believe more guns means more crimes, and firearm control is necessary to bring peace to society. Some participants cited school shootings in the USA as an example of what consequences of a pro-gun environment are. Other participants believe that guns are used just to intimidate and feel empowerment.

Two participants said they believe firearms could indirectly influence a safer environment. Charlotte mentioned she feels safer when she is in a place where policemen are nearby. She explained that the chance of her being the victim of a crime is almost zero since the police have the necessary training to use firearms. Next, William argued that firearms in the countryside could bring security since citizens are more vulnerable to attack, and it could take

time for the police to arrive after a crime. He is not in favor of firearms in big cities, for they have enough technological resources to address crimes, yet he is in favor of guns to be allowed in the country.

Results

The Brazilians living in the USA interviewed in this project demonstrated being anti-gun advocates in a majority. They would have voted in favor of gun control in the 2005 Brazilian Firearm Referendum if they had a chance. They would rather not have access to guns since they relate firearms with danger and believe guns are not responsible for promoting a safer environment. Moreover, guns give a false feeling of security and it would not be a solution for violence issues since technology could help address crimes nowadays. According to the participants, more guns means more violence.

Just a few participants migrated to the USA having security as a major reason while others moved into the country for education and work means. Even though some participants have said that security could be related to the region people go to, over half of the participants feel safe in the USA. However, a few participants said they feel safer in Brazil since they have been a crime victim in the US which has not happened when they were in Brazil. In a majority, the participants believe that income distribution, crime legislation and education can promote a safer environment.

CONCLUSION

This study had the purpose to understand the perspective of people who have been in contact with both gun control and pro-gun culture. The findings can contribute to the gun debate regarding whether guns should be allowed, for it captures people's experiences and feelings about the topic in different environments. Since there are no studies available considering this topic, this study can contribute to a combined discussion about guns in Brazil and in the USA.

It was found that Brazilians living in the USA do not believe that feeling of security is related to access to guns. Guns were linked with a false feeling of security, for firearms give a sense of empowerment, and people do not feel confident in having the psychological and physical aptitude to react in a crime. Moreover, the participants demonstrated feeling safer without a gun since they believe a chance of survival is higher if they do not retaliate in a crime. For instance, some of the participants have experienced kidnapping and robbery, and they believe it could have ended in a tragedy if they were carrying a gun. Also, firearms are not responsible for promoting a safer environment, and easy access to guns is not one of the reasons for Brazilians to migrate to the USA. As a cause of violence, this study has found that income distribution, criminal legislation and education would be responsible for promoting a safer place.

However, more studies need to be done to address the topic object of this research since it has some limitations. First, a majority of the participants have only lived in the Chicago area. For an accurate result, future studies need to consider Brazilians living in different cities and states in the US. Second, a majority of the participants are from big cities in Brazil. It is important to listen to Brazilians from different regions. With this approach, a more precise result could be possible.

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