

Socio-Cultural Settings and the Meaning of Gun Ownership and Presence: Comparing Pilot Samples from the United States and Israel

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ABSTRACT

Civilian gun ownership is hotly debated in societies around the world, especially in the United States. This study added to the discussion by comparing samples from two countries representing opposite extremes in terms of civilian gun access policy: the US where the right of civilians to own guns is Constitution-based and Israel where civilian access to guns is extremely limited and strictly supervised. One hundred and two American and 142 Israeli citizens completed a series of online measures of exposure to guns, attitudes, meaning attributed to gun ownership, and gun culture. Significant differences were found on all measures. The Israeli sample reported higher endorsement of civilian gun ownership, and Israelis associated gun ownership and presence in the civilian space with enhanced security. Gun culture was predominantly self-defense in both samples, but the US sample also showed higher prevalence of other cultures, such as hunting and sport. Gender played a major role in the results in both samples, with women reporting lower endorsement of gun ownership by civilians and attributing more risk and chance of violence to the presence of guns in their environment. The results are discussed in the socio-political and cultural context.

Keywords: guns, civilian gun ownership, attitudes, attributed meaning, gun culture, United States, Israel.

INTRODUCTION

The presence of guns in our lives is a deeply debated phenomenon. While human beings have always carried and used weapons for various purposes, modern communities, cultures, and legal systems view the presence of guns in everyday settings in very different ways (Karp, 2018). The ownership patterns and the presence of guns in different societies vary dramatically and may be attributed to factors such as local history, culture, socio-political aspects of governance and security, and more (De Waard, 1999). Every once in a while, the interest in gun ownership among the general population becomes the center of attention, eliciting heated debates, with even more hotly debated evidence to back the claims of all involved (Cottrol & Diamond, 2020). The recent rise in the sense of urgency and importance of the debate takes place in the wake of a rising trend of gun-based, violent events, mainly in the United States, but with some anecdotal evidence from the European Union (Krusselmann et al., 2023; Salari et al., 2020).

Private gun ownership and the strictness of laws and regulations for gun licensure, ownership, and storage have consistently been associated with gun-related violence and mortality. Access to guns and the presence of guns in the physical environment are generally the leading predictors of gun violence (Kolbe, 2020; Snchez et al., 2020), but they are followed by a long list of additional factors, including urbanization, socio-economical and racial inequality, a consistent perception of hopelessness, and emotional distress (APA, 2014; Wanser-Nanney, 2021). Numerous studies have explored factors associating gun ownership, the availability of guns, and other factors with gun violence; fewer have focused on people's reactions to the presence of guns in their lives. For example, do guns make us feel safer? Do they make us look at our physical and social settings differently? What meaning do we attach to guns' presence in our lives? This study explored these questions in a socio-political manner, comparing respondents in the US and Israeli.

Gun Culture and The Meanings Associated with Gun Ownership

The term 'gun culture' was coined by Hofstadler (1970). It initially referred to a US-specific set of norms and attitudes associating gun ownership with the safeguarding of citizens' rights and their potential ability to resist the government, but it developed into a more complex model according to which separate gun cultures exist. Authors have focused on the following: (1) a culture of sport-related gun ownership (from target or other competitive shooting to recreational hunting); (2) gun ownership for self-defense; (3) gun ownership as symbolic support of the 2nd Amendment to the US Constitution and civilians' right to resist oppression (Boine et al., 2020). These notions were developed and validated in the US; we extended them by testing them in another socio-political and cultural setting.

Another important aspect of gun culture is a derivative of the cultural motivation to own a gun: people's attitudes towards gun ownership and the part guns play in everyday life. What meanings do people attribute to the presence of guns around them? Are they perceived as tools of destruction or means for maintaining safety and peace? How central and important are they for people bearing arms and those around them? Existing research, again mainly from the US, shows that many gun owners attribute importance to owning a gun (or guns) and see guns as part of their identity and lifestyle (Lacombe et al., 2019). Female identity has a more intricate association with gun ownership, possibly moderated by liberal versus conservative world views (Kelley, 2022). In recent years, there has been a deepening socio-political chasm between various political parties in the American population, and evidence suggests gun ownership has become a component of conservative, religious, right-wing political identity (Joslyn et al., 2017).

However, all these findings are for the US. We wished to extend the existing knowledge on identity related aspects of gun ownership as a function of socio-political and cultural settings beyond the US context.

US and Israel in a Comparative Context

We compared attitudes to gun ownership in two very dissimilar settings: the US and Israel. This comparison allowed us to test the role of the socio-political/cultural context in shaping the meaning and perceptions of civilian gun ownership and gun presence in one's everyday life. Theoretically framing our research were the following assumptions based on the literature: socio-political factors rooted in history and social interests shape gun culture (Hofstadler,

1970; Boine et al., 2020); these factors, as well as gun culture, shape the meaning and perceptions people attribute to guns' presence (Pierre, 2019).

Socio-Political and Legal Context:

Israel and the US are extreme opposites on the socio-political continuum when it comes to private gun ownership. The US is characterized by an (inaccurate but prevalent) ethos of a nation arising from civic insubordination against tyranny (Lund, 2021). The right to bear arms is in the Constitution and is also anchored in the American ethos of self-sufficiency. Guns are accessible, easy to obtain and register, and ownership regulations are considered loose at best (Gunn & Boxer, 2021).

Israel has always separated the 'civilian' from the 'military', from its war for independence to the present day. Originally established within a socialist frame – the state is perceived as the entity in charge of caring for individuals and keeping them safe. Thus, army and police, armed with military grade weapons, are present in public areas. Civilians are not expected to carry guns unless specific circumstances require it (Masters, 2022). Gun owners must complete mandatory training and re-licensure every 4-6 years.

Gun Ownership and Gun Prevalence/Presence:

The US and Israel stand on opposite sides of a divide in gun ownership and gun prevalence/presence. The US leads the world in private gun ownership with about 89 guns per 100 people in the general population. Most Americans use guns at some point in their lives. Israel is near the bottom, with about seven guns per 100 people in the general population. However, we cannot assume Israelis are less exposed to guns, as the majority of Israelis serve in the military (and have at least basic gun training), and security forces are quite visible and present in almost all public spaces (e.g., a gun-wielding guard stands at the entrance of each shopping mall, any public building, etc.).

Gun Culture/Perceptions:

While the US has participated in military conflict and experienced terrorism, most such events (with the obvious exception of September 11) have taken place overseas. Accordingly, civilian guns are geared towards self-defense in a criminal context, recreational usage (target shooting, practical shooting, hunting, etc.), or collection (many gun owners in the US own numerous weapons), again falling under the ideological and cultural ethos of self-sufficiency, with laws supporting civilian use of weapons in case of property law violations, etc. (Gutenberg & Gabor, 2023).

In Israel, civilian guns are predominantly seen as a means of self-defense against acts of terrorism. A few anecdotal events in which armed citizens stopped perpetrators in acts of terrorism, even before police or military forces could arrive at the scene, have promoted civilian gun ownership (Avitan-Cohen, 2018). Alongside a rise in illegal weapons owned by crime families and organizations, especially in Arab society in Israel's periphery, the view of guns as means of self-defense against 'enemies' has become solidified.

Gun-Related Crime and Random Violence:

The US leads world statistics for mass civilian shootings. In 2019, mass shootings in the US accounted for over 70% of world-wide incidence (Silva, 2022). The last decade has seen a

dramatic rise in civilian shooting events, especially school shootings, followed by others (e.g., shopping mall shootings, etc.) (US Department of Defense, 2022). The trend whereby defenseless and innocent youth are killed by seemingly random shooters (from disgruntled employees to students with guns) has led to little change in policy, despite a deepening gulf between supporters of gun control and supporters of the right to bear arms (Gutenberg & Gabor, 2023).

In Israel, such events are almost nonexistent. Mass shootings by civilians have not occurred in recent Israeli history. However, civilian gun-related violence appears in incidents of domestic violence (e.g., a security guard killed his spouse with his work licensed gun) and organized crime (Avitan-Cohen, 2018). In the last few years, most events associated with civilians using their licensed guns were in the context of intervening in acts of terrorism, and these have been increasing (General Security Service, 2022).

The Current Study

Based on the above, we sought to gain preliminary insights from a comparative analysis of civilians' attitudes and the meaning they attach to civilian gun ownership and gun presence in the social environment. We hypothesized that there would be differences between Israeli and US samples in the above measures. Due to the preliminary and exploratory nature of the study, we did not formulate unidirectional hypotheses.

METHOD

Sample

Two samples of 142 Israeli and 104 American civilians (not currently in active roles in security forces, military, police etc.) were recruited online through social networks and online bulletin boards. Samples consisted of 88% men in Israel (the rest were women), and 58% men in the US. The mean ages were 43 (s.d.=12.34) in Israel and 48.75 (s.d.=14.52) in the US. Education and income levels varied between the samples. The American sample was slightly more educated (higher proportions of academics). In each country, participants' incomes were compared with the average household income. The American participants showed a slightly higher than average household income than the Israeli sample; the latter showed a close to normal distribution. All differences were statistically significant. All participants reported either owning a gun (around 70% in both samples) or living in a household with a gun.

Measures

To assess the variables of interest, we used existing measures taken from the US literature and had them back-to-back translated to Hebrew. The following measures were used in both samples.

Demographics:

Non-identifying personal information was collected, including gender, age, gun ownership and length of time owning guns, exposure to guns, and experience (whether or not participants ever used a gun, were victims to gun violence, harmed others using a gun, etc.).

Gun-Related Attitudes:

Attitudes were assessed using a questionnaire on attitudes on gun control (Pew, 2012). This is a 4-item attitude scale. Respondents are asked to rank their support of statements for and

against restrictions or encouragement of private gun ownership. Reliabilities reported for the scale range above .80.

Gun Culture:

This was assessed using a short questionnaire asking respondents to note the extent to which every type of usage is relevant for their reasons and practice of owning a gun (or guns). The 5-item questionnaire mentions the main gun cultures mentioned in the literature: self-defense, sport, hunting, work-related, and other (Wertz et al., 2018).

Risk/Threat Perception:

To measure risk/threat perception, we used a modified version of the California School Climate and Safety Survey-short form (Furlong et al., 2005), slightly revised to refer to a local community rather than a school. We used only the subscale assessing perceived safety. The 8-item questionnaire asks respondents to report the extent to which various unsafe events occur in their community (e.g., violence, burglary, etc.). One item asks them to rank the level of 'feeling unsafe' in their community. Reported reliabilities for this subscale range from .75 to .80.

Meaning of Gun Ownership:

We used an 8-item measure by Siegel and Boine (2020) assessing various aspects of meaning attributed to gun ownership, ranging from owning a gun to enhance a sense of safety to issues such as guns being a part of one's identity or lifestyle. This scale was not summed into a general score. Each item was examined separately.

Procedure

After receiving approval from the author's IRB, questionnaires were distributed in Israel and the US through social networks and online groups. The study targeted adults who either had a privately owned gun (at least one) or lived in a household where there was at least one gun. They were asked to participate in a study on 'people's perceptions and feelings about guns. Anonymity was assured, as was the right to withdraw from the study at any stage until the submission of the completed forms. Because no identifying data were collected at any point of the process, and no data were recorded for people who began taking the survey but dropped out, there is no way of telling how many refused to participate. However, it is worth mentioning that responses to the call on social networks was greeted with a lot of good will (especially from gun owners) in Israel and with some wariness from some in the US.

RESULTS

Before we tested the research hypotheses, we calculated descriptive statistics for the study variables and simple zero-order intercorrelations. These are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations (n=246).

	Mean SD	Reliability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Gender	-	-	-													
2. Age	45.45 13.56	-	.37*	-												
3. Education	-	-	.30*	.11	-											
4. Exposure to guns	2.63 1.46	.67	-.50*	-.23*	-.14*	-										

5. Perceived threat	15.53 7.00	.93	.09	-.06	-.11	.00	-									
6. Attitudes	3.75 1.19	.84	-.54* *	-.19**	-.26* *	.48* *	-.16* *	-								
7. I feel safer carrying a gun	4.30 1.02	--	-.50* *	-.23* *	-.25* *	.27* *	-.04	.63* *	-							
8. I feel more powerful	2.68 1.51	--	.04	-.21* *	.03	.01	.14* *	.07	.31* *	-						
9. More afraid for safety	1.71 1.16	--	.28* *	-.04	.14* *	-.18* *	.12	-.68* *	.48* *	-.05	-					
10. More likely to take risks	1.71 1.13	--	.16* *	-.16* *	-.03	.07	.16* *	-.32* *	.26* *	.22* *	.39* *	-				
11. Gun is part of identity	2.67 1.56	--	-.22* *	.05	-.20* *	.21* *	-.12	.39* *	.43* *	.37* *	-.22* *	.04	-			
12. Gun is part of lifestyle	2.61 1.67	--	-.04	.14* *	-.10	.28* *	.17* *	.30* *	.32* *	.30* *	-.15* *	.09	.57* *	-		
13. Guns encourage crime	1.85 1.25	--	.40* *	.12	.27* *	-.22* *	.32* *	-.68* *	.42* *	.10	.46* *	.38* *	-.20* *	.01	-	
14. Guns decrease violence	3.58 1.35	--	-.33* *	.12	.09	.23* *	-.03	.69* *	.47* *	.09	-.40* *	-.12	.34* *	.38* *	-.40* *	-

Note: Gender and education were categorical variables and therefore descriptives have been provided elsewhere.

The analyses were run on the full sample and showed no ceiling or floor effects, reasonable distribution for all variables, and acceptable or high reliability coefficients for the scales. Preliminary associations were calculated first for each sample separately, but as they were almost identical, for the sake of simplicity and brevity, they are presented in a single sample format: the associations we found supported trends observed in the literature, Gender (being female) was associated with less-favorable views of guns and their meaning. Exposure to guns was positively associated with both attitudes and meaning attributed to gun ownership, with age and education were negatively associated with attitudes and meaning. Perceiving one's environment as unsafe or threatening showed some negative associations with attitudinal and meaning aspects of gun ownership or showed no association.

Similar statistics were then calculated for the gun culture items. These are summarized in Table 2. Self-defense was the most dominant culture by a landslide, followed by sport. The least dominant was hunting.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for 'gun culture' items in both samples.

	Valid	Missing	Mean	S.D.	Minimum	Maximum
Self Defence	184	62	4.71	0.81	1.00	5.00
Sports	178	68	2.84	1.63	1.00	5.00
Hunting	180	66	1.63	1.31	1.00	5.00
Work related	180	66	2.42	1.67	1.00	5.00
Collection	178	68	1.98	1.52	1.00	5.00

Note: Missing values represent participants who do not own guns.

Next, we compared findings for the main variables for both samples. Since gender and education distributions varied dramatically in both samples, we controlled for them as covariates. Table 3 gives the results.

Table 3: Comparing Israeli and US samples.

	Mean (sd) Israel	Mean (sd) US	t (df)
Attitudes	4.11 (.91)	3.28 (1.36)	5.67 (242) **
Perceived threat	12.37 (5.24)	19.73 (6.99)	-9.39 (242) **
Exposure to guns	2.88 (1.35)	2.28 (1.41)	3.34 (242) **
Meaning of gun ownership			
I feel safer carrying a gun	4.46 (.89)	4.00 (1.18)	3.15 (204) **
I feel more powerful	2.53 (1.46)	2.94 (1.57)	-1.85 (204)
More afraid for safety	1.53 (1.00)	2.05 (1.34)	-3.11 (204) **
More likely to take risks	1.64 (1.07)	1.86 (1.27)	-1.82 (204)
Gun is part of identity	2.83 (1.57)	2.37 (1.54)	1.99 (200) *
Gun is part of lifestyle	2.19 (1.53)	3.43 (1.63)	-5.33 (202) **
Guns encourage crime	1.61 (.98)	2.28 (1.57)	-3.76 (202) **
Guns decrease violence	3.63 (1.30)	3.48 (1.47)	.75 (200)
Gun culture			
Self defense	4.95 (.21)	4.25 (1.25)	5.94 (182) **
Sport	2.50 (1.50)	3.55 (1.58)	-4.21 (176) **
Hunting	1.10 (.34)	2.70 (1.78)	-4.37 (178) **
Work related	2.13 (1.53)	3.00 (1.78)	-3.37 (178) **
Collection	1.50 (1.16)	2.90 (1.68)	-6.10 (176) **

*p<.05 **p<.01

The results revealed numerous differences between the two samples in most variables. The most prominent differences were the following. First, while perception of threat was lower in Israel than in the US, support of gun ownership attitudes was higher in Israel. Second, and unexpectedly, exposure to guns in everyday life was higher in Israel than the US despite the restriction on gun ownership and activity; this was probably due to mandatory military service for most citizens. Third, Israelis attributed more positive meanings to gun ownership, perceived it as contributing to safety and security, and gave less weight to the dangers associated with gun ownership. Fourth, while Israelis endorsed the statement that gun ownership was part of their identity, they ranked guns as part of their lifestyle to a lesser extent than their American counterparts. Fifth, self-defense was the most dominant context/gun culture reported in both samples, but was more salient in Israel. Other gun cultures were ranked dramatically lower, with hunting the lowest. Since gender significantly affected the results (and was partialled out for the comparisons above), we examined the associations between gender and the compared variables controlling for samples (Israel/US). Table 4 summarizes the main associations between gender and the focal variables (attitudes and meaning of gun ownership) controlling for sample country.

Table 4: Gender's association with the focal variables in the study, controlling for country.
Correlation

Pearson's Partial Correlations											
Variable		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender		—									
2. Attitudes		-0.46	—								
3. I feel safer		-0.46	0.61	—							
4. I feel more powerful		-0.01	0.10	0.35	—						
5.more afraid		0.22	-0.67	-0.46	-0.08	—					
6.more likely to take risks		0.14	-0.31	-0.24	0.21	0.38	—				
7. part of who I am		-0.18	0.37	0.42	0.39	-0.20	0.05	—			
8. part of my lifestyle		-0.21	0.40	0.42	0.27	-0.23	0.06	0.67	—		
9. guns encourage violent crime		0.33	-0.66	-0.39	0.07	0.43	0.38	-0.17	-0.07	—	
10.guns decrease crime		-0.34	0.69	0.47	0.10	-0.40	-0.12		0.42	-0.40	—
Note. Conditioned on variables : Countryofresidence.											

The results showed how meaningful gender is beyond and above the involvement and role of socio-cultural settings. In both samples, women consistently viewed gun ownership and presence in their environment as less favorable, more dangerous, and less a means to ensure safety or security.

DISCUSSION

Civilians have always owned guns, but the meaning and implications of civilian gun ownership have varied dramatically throughout history (Yamane, 2017). Gun culture and the meaning of guns' presence depend on the society and the era. To better understand the socio-cultural differences in gun-related attitudes, gun culture, and meaning attributed to gun ownership among civilians, we compared samples of American and Israeli civilians – countries with extremely different approaches to gun policy. We found dramatic differences in most measures, as well as some similarities and consistencies which shed new light on what guns mean to people in different settings.

Consistencies and Similarities

First, it is worth noting that the measures' psychometric characteristics were well within the acceptable range, with almost no variation between the samples. This may reflect the methodological robustness of the measures used, as well as some consistency, at least in the relevance of the concepts of gun-related attitudes, meaning, and culture.

Despite the obvious disparities between the US and Israel, we found some consistencies – especially in the dominance of a self-defense culture of gun ownership in both countries. While alternative gun cultures, such as hunting, sport, and collection, were evident, especially in the US, our finding of the salience of self-defense echoes other authors' discussion of the rise of 'gun culture 2.0' in which self-defense takes high priority in an armed society that becomes increasingly likely to be dangerous (Roth, 2002; Yamane, 2017).

In both samples, correlations between the background variables, attitudes, and meaning attributed to gun ownership suggest that unlike existing studies that have associated a

tendency to view one's environment as threatening as a motivation to own guns (Vegter & Haider-Markel, 2022), our findings suggest there may be a negative association between perceived threat in one's social and physical environment and gun-endorsing attitudes and the meaning attributed to gun presence. While we found differences in level of endorsement, both samples said they felt safer owning a gun and viewed guns generally as a factor decreasing risk and violence.

US-Israel Sample Differences

Generally, the Israeli sample ranked attitudes to guns, and exposure to guns (gun-related experience) higher than their American counterparts and ranked perceived threat lower. These differences may highlight some of the deep-rooted differences in the respondents' 'reality of threat': While in the US, gun availability is socially and historically associated with events of mass shooting and random acts of gun violence (Reeping et al., 2019), in Israel, gun violence is directly associated with two types of events: terrorist attacks on civilian targets and more recently, organized crime (Perry et al., 2019). Therefore, on a daily basis, threat is perceived to emanate from 'others' rather than random individuals in the community. The association of gun ownership with the potential reduction of terror attacks, as well as the fact that for most Israelis, gun usage is associated with military and security issues, may also explain why attitudes supporting gun ownership are higher in Israel.

Gun Cultures:

Despite clear cultural and historical differences between the two countries, both samples marked self-defense as the main purpose and culture around their ownership of guns. This pattern accords with findings from the US and, in fact, from most of the world (Kocsis, 2015). However, there is good reason to suggest that even when using the same title for the ideas – values and norms of gun ownership – different contexts may give the same terms different meanings (Belbin, 2018). Gun ownership by citizens in the US is often associated with the 2nd Amendment to the Constitution and the right to bear arms should the need arise to resist the government. Until very recently, this idea has not been prevalent in Israeli culture (Mavis & Shapiro, 2019). In the Israeli context, civilian gun ownership and use have been seen almost exclusively in two contexts: self-defense in criminal and in terror-related settings, with the latter becoming more prevalent and significant in recent years (Aharoni et al., 2022). While Israel seems to be moving towards more liberal policies of gun licensure for civilians, the major reason is to ensure self-defense in a terrorist attack. The option of using arms to rebel against the government is not even a radical option (e.g., Kurtz, 2023).

Other reasons for owning a gun were ranked higher in the US sample (e.g., sport, hunting etc.). While there is a small but distinct sport-oriented gun culture in Israel, it is highly regulated and demanding. Policies do not allow occasional shooters into this circle; sport licenses are given only to actively registered competitive club members, and this naturally narrows the circle. Hunting is generally illegal in Israel, with minor exceptions for several species in specific seasons, and this again requires a special license. Overall, Israel does not have a hunting culture (Israel Parks Authority, 2023).

Meaning Attributed to Gun Ownership and Guns' Presence in Civilian Life:

Our focal question concerned the meaning attributed to gun ownership and the presence of guns in the civilian space. The results showed numerous differences between the two samples.

Overall, compared to the American sample, the Israeli sample tended to view the presence of guns and gun ownership by civilians as a source of an increased sense of security and safety and did not associate gun presence with an increased risk of violence.

Interestingly, while Israelis ranked feeling that gun ownership was part of their identity higher than their American counterparts, the opposite trend was observed for the item describing gun ownership as part of one's lifestyle. How can we reconcile these two opposing trends? We suggest the respective socio-political and cultural settings offer an explanation. Gun ownership in Israel is earned, not a basic right. A gun license is most commonly given to people in high-risk vocations, persons living in border areas, professional military and police forces, and to a much smaller extent, to professional competitive shooters (Rosenbaum, 2012). Therefore, owning a gun says something about oneself, and gun owners will see their gun as part of their identity. However, American participants reported higher agreement with the item describing gun ownership as part of a lifestyle. Gun lifestyle is definitely a cultural element, part of American heritage and society, with entire communities training, accumulating impressive gun arsenals, and leading a lifestyle revolving around gun ownership and use (e.g., Scodari, 1994; Kalesan et al., 2016). Such a lifestyle is nearly nonexistent in Israeli settings: civilians very rarely are allowed to own more than a single pistol or revolver, and rifles and automatic weapons are not allowed to nonmilitary/security forces personnel. Most civilians rarely attend 'free shooting sessions' at shooting ranges and only practice their gun skills around the periodical renewal of the permits (Israeli law requires a supervised target shooting practice for gun license renewal every four to five years), leaving little room for practicing a gun-related lifestyle.

Gender and Gun-Related Attitudes and Attributed Meaning:

Gender emerged in this study as one of the most significant intervening variables. It is therefore worthwhile examining its associations with our focal variables beyond the effect of sample (Israel/US). This is not new; gender consistently emerges as a significant factor differentiating gun-related attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (Warner, 2020). In this respect, the study's findings validate existing patterns and show a consistent trend by which women see guns as a potential danger to safety rather than a tool to maintain safety or security, associate guns' presence with violence, and show less favorable attitudes to civilian gun ownership. Within the context of this study, gender may be seen as an overarching culture, going beyond socio-political settings and cultural assumptions typical of the two samples and adding complexity to the cross-cultural comparison. Similar results were reported by Aharoni and colleagues (2022), thus lending support to our interpretation.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

This study was a preliminary comparison based on pilot samples. The samples, though large enough to provide statistical power, are not representative of any of the populations involved but only reflect aspects and sections within them. Moreover, while our research points to directions and trends, future research should use more diverse samples within each targeted population. The same applies to settings. While Israel and the US represent two extreme positions on the gun policy and culture continuum, comparisons of additional settings along the continuum would illuminate how cultural nuances work their way into perceptions and experiences of civilian gun ownership.

We used generally accepted measures and indicators of our variables, with internal consistency and consistent results validating the measures, but the choice of measure may be a source for bias (Arnold & Feldman, 1981). Therefore, future studies should use other measures and means of assessing gun-related perceptions to validate our findings.

CONCLUSION

Our comparison of US and Israeli samples' attitudes and the meaning they attributed to gun ownership and presence in civilian settings revealed consistent and dramatic differences. It seems Israelis view guns as means of maintaining safety and security in the context of a rising risk of terror attacks and organized crime. The Israeli sample showed higher support of gun ownership attitudes and felt safer in the presence of guns in the civilian space than the American sample. The US sample, in turn, showed higher endorsement of more diverse gun cultures and tended to associate gun ownership and presence among civilians with gun violence and loss of personal safety. We argue these differences may be explained by the countries' socio-political and cultural differences. In an interesting similarity, in both samples, gender emerged as a strong factor shaping the perceptions of what gun ownership means.

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