

Gun Talk Online: Canadian Tools, American Values*

Dylan S. McLean, *University of West Georgia*

Objective. The objective of this study is to address the following question: Why has the United States been so reluctant to embrace the type of comprehensive gun control that is in place in every other developed democracy? *Method.* The method used to address this question is a computerized content analysis on nearly 18 million words that were extracted from online political discussions of Canadian and American gun enthusiasts. A comparison of these discussions was guided by three theories on the character and origins of Canadian–American political difference. *Results.* The results demonstrate that the instrumental components of gun ownership are more relevant for Canadian gun enthusiasts, while American gun enthusiasts view their arms as physical manifestations of political values. These values are consistent with a widely perceived American ideology that centers on individual freedom and antipathy toward government. *Conclusion.* This leads to the conclusion that U.S. gun rights groups are naturally advantaged in the gun control debate because their rhetoric finds fertile soil beyond the gun enthusiast segment, and helps explain the intensity of their opposition to gun control.

The tenor of the American gun debate may wax and wane—sparked by tragedy to only be snuffed by inaction—but America’s exceptional relationship with guns stubbornly persists. In an absolute sense and on a per capita basis, there are more guns in private hands in the United States than there are in *any* other country (Alpers et al., 2015); gun control regulations are less restrictive in the United States than they are in any other comparable country (Kopel, 1992; McLean, 2015); and the United States has a very robust and politically influential gun culture that helps perpetuate these differences (Burbick, 2006; Carlson, 2015; Kohn, 2004a). How can this be explained? Why do so many Americans embrace firearms so passionately? And what underlies America’s stubborn reluctance to embrace contemporary and comprehensive gun control regulations?

This article addresses these questions by looking at a largely kindred society, Canada. Comparative analyses of Canada and the United States are compelling because the two societies are about as similar as any two countries could be, but they are also profoundly dissimilar in several important respects (Lipset, 1986:114). The individuals who comprise gun culture, in both countries are generally opposed to all but the most minimal forms of gun control. This perspective has experienced significant policy success in the United States while the opposite has been true in Canada. This article conducts a computerized content analysis of roughly 18 million words mined from the political sections of online discussion forums that cater to gun enthusiasts in each country. This analysis points to the conclusion that the “gun rights” side of the gun debate is naturally advantaged in the United States while it is disadvantaged in Canada, and presumably other countries.

*Direct correspondence to Dylan S. McLean, Department of Political Science, University of West Georgia, 1601 Maple St., Carrollton, GA 30118 (dmclean@westga.edu). Dylan S. McLean will share all data and coding for replication purposes.

Competing theoretical explanations for the origins of Canadian–American political differences range from the legacy of founding circumstances and settlement patterns to contrasting legal traditions (see Baer, Grabb, and Johnston, 1993; Grabb and Curtis, 2005; Hartz, 1964; Kaufman, 2009; Lipset, 1988, 1990a; McRae, 1964). Since Canada and the United States differ significantly in terms of gun control policy and gun culture, applying these theories to the politics of guns may help us understand that important difference. They purport to be capable of explaining cross-national differences in general; therefore, they should also be capable of explaining why each country's gun control regimes and gun cultures differ so dramatically. This article evaluates them and asks which is most consistent with the political values observed in the discussions of these enthusiasts. This allows for an evaluation of the general validity of the theories but, more significantly, can help explain the roots of opposition to gun control and the strength of gun culture in the United States. They are the driving force behind resistance to gun control. It is therefore sensible to seek an important piece of the puzzle that is America's resistance to gun control by closely focusing on them.

The article finds that Canadian and American gun enthusiasts differ from each other in the manner expected by Lipset's "revolutionary origins thesis." Lipset argues that the values and circumstances of the period surrounding the American Revolution led to the emergence of an American ideology defined by, among other things, individual freedom and a strong suspicion of the state. This article presents evidence that this ideology, or creed, reveals itself in online political discussions by American gun enthusiasts much more than their Canadian counterparts, and it points toward the conclusion that this ideology is more consistent with a perspective that is generally opposed to all but the most basic forms of gun control. This implies that the value-laden arguments made by gun rights activists and organizations are able to resonate with a broader swath of the American public because they find fertile soil there. Furthermore, it also indicates that the strength of American gun culture—and its lobby—has its roots in the nonintrinsic allure of firearm ownership. The value-laden nature of discussion by the Americans indicates that, to many American gun owners, guns are not simply physical objects; they are likely viewed as physical representations of political values that are central to American identity in general. Therefore, regulatory threats to those objects are interpreted as threats to the political values they embody.

This article begins by introducing the theories that will serve as a guide for the empirical analysis. The focus of that empirical analysis is the value orientations of members of gun culture and is therefore a response to the recent calls for more work of the sociology of this subculture (see, e.g., Yamane, 2017). Also, the findings situate this article in the segment of this literature that has identified the symbolic value of guns (such as Carlson, 2015; Kohn, 2004a; Stroud, 2012). After the results have been presented and discussed, the article concludes by discussing exactly how these findings help explain the resistance of the United States to broad and modern gun regulations.

Canadian–American Difference

The literature on Canadian–American political difference is premised on the observation that these two societies are incredibly similar when viewed from a global perspective yet markedly different if compared in isolation. This article will briefly review three theories that attempt to explain this. These countries also constitute an ideal pair of cases for an application of the "most similar systems" research design in which the similarities serve as a measure of control (Przeworski and Teune, 1970).

Lipset's "Origins Thesis"

Lipset's "origins thesis," which is most completely presented in *Continental Divide* (1990a), argues that the American Revolution resulted in the formation of two distinct societies.¹ The most important determinant of Canadian and American difference was the path taken away from Great Britain. The United States severed ties with its colonizer in a violent rebellion, whereas Canada moved toward further autonomy over a long period in which it was incrementally granted further independence. The revolutionary-era loyalist migration additionally infused English Canada with individuals, often elites, who held anti-revolutionary values. He also argues that French Canada was dominated by elites hostile to the revolutionary values they observed developing in France. According to Lipset, the political cultures of Canada and the United States are akin to trains moving along parallel tracks: one track begins in revolution, the other in counterrevolution. Canada was founded in opposition to the classically liberal values espoused in the American Declaration of Independence and was destined to be less libertarian, less individualistic, and more deferential to authority. It would give pride of place to "peace, order, and good government." Meanwhile, the track of the United States was defined by its individualistic revolutionary-era values of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Lipset's theory leads to hypotheses that postulate notable contrasts in general between Canadians and Americans and, in particular, those that predict exceptional contrasts in terms of individualistic sentiment.

Grabb and Curtis

In *Regions Apart*, Grabb and Curtis (2005) directly challenge Lipset's revolutionary origins thesis.² The analysis builds from the premise that "the deep-structural forces operating in any specific society will normally involve both the fundamental markers and meanings provided by a common language and the underlying guides and credos found in long-standing systems of values and beliefs" (2005:30). Their argument is that, well before the American Revolution, the English-speaking societies of North America were imbued with the English "deep structures" of liberty, legal equality, popular sovereignty, and pluralism. The most relevant of these for the purposes of this project and as a contrast with Lipset is liberty. It is their assertion that liberty, as it was understood and practiced in the relevant time period, did not carry the libertarian or individualistic connotations that our conception of the term today does; rather, it had more to do with economic freedom. The American Revolution and the loyalist migration are thus not viewed as significant causal factors in North American differentiation. According to Grabb and Curtis, English Canada and early America, particularly the Northeast, were kindred societies from the beginning and they still have a great deal in common today. They do identify four distinct subsocieties and find that the aforementioned two have the most in common. The American South and French Canada were influenced by different deep structures and stand apart as two other distinct societies; their influence explains aggregate differences. If we follow Grabb and

¹ See also Lipset (1986, 1988, 1990b).

² This book-length work represents the culmination of a research program that included several earlier article-length contributions (Baer, Grabb, and Johnston, 1990; Baer et al., 1993; Grabb, Baer, and Curtis, 1999; Grabb, Curtis, and Baer, 2000). It is also largely an outgrowth of the founding fragment literature (see Hartz, 1955, 1964; Horowitz, 1966; McRae, 1964). As was the case with Lipset, the book is focused on as it is the most complete and developed statement of their theory. Therefore, these critics of Lipset will simply be referred to as Grabb and Curtis.

Curtis, we would hypothesize that the values of Canadians and Americans should broadly be similar, particularly with regard to beliefs about individual liberty as well as views on the collective versus the individual and the proper role of the state. And this is especially the case if northeastern Americans are directly compared with English-speaking Canadians.

Kaufman

Kaufman's (2009) explanation for Canadian–American political difference is rooted in the consequences of contrasting legal institutions. Lines of jurisdictional authority in colonial America were often vague, overlapping, and occasionally absent and there was typically little consistency across the colonies. Disputes surrounding governmental jurisdiction and even private property rights and boundaries were commonplace. However, in what is now Canada, both under French rule and later under the English, the lines of authority as well as the relationship between the colonials and crown were clear. Americans therefore became accustomed to fighting for themselves, whether legally or physically, and this led to a litigious and individualistic culture. Although Kaufman takes a different path to reach his conclusions, the implications of those conclusions are broadly similar to Lipset: each country's founding creeds, "Peace, Order, and Good Government" on the one hand and "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" on the other, reveal a great deal about each country's national character. However, there is one very significant and testable observable implication that differentiates Kaufman's theory from the others. Because early Americans became accustomed to fighting for themselves to protect their property rights—rather than relying on the state to do so—Kaufman's theoretical work leads to the hypothesis that Americans should be more sensitive to infringements on their property rights than Canadians.

Methods

Internet-based social media, such as discussion forums, have mostly been studied through the lens of communication research by, for example, examining the consequences of online political discussion on the public sphere (Dahlgren, 2005), demonstrating ideological cyber self-segregation (Galston, 2003; Hill and Hughes, 1998), or focusing on the degree to which online political discussions adhere to various norms of communication (Freelon, 2010, 2015). However, actually examining the content of these online discussion groups has thus far been rare. Jenkins, Nikolaev, and Porpora (2012) observe this and examine the content of discussion groups to learn about moral reasoning in the debate about the Iraq War. Similarly, this article is less concerned with the communication itself, and more with what that communication can reveal about an underlying concept of interest. In this case, the relevant question is: Do differences in national value systems reveal themselves in online political discourse?

Data and Sample Selection

The data for this analysis were extracted from the political sections of *canadiangun-nutz.com* (hereafter CGN) and *nyfirearms.com* (hereafter NYF). CGN was primarily selected because it has a section devoted to politics, has a primarily Canadian user base,

and is the most popular Canadian website for firearm-related discussion (Alexa Internet, 2014). The politics section of a forum that caters to gun owners in New York was selected on theoretical grounds: if we follow Grabb and Curtis, New Yorkers should be nearly indistinguishable from English Canadians; by pairing CGN and NYF we can compare New York gun enthusiasts to English-Canadian gun enthusiasts directly, thereby conducting a critical test of this theory. Also, the gun control regime present in New York is one of the country's most restrictive and therefore more like Canada than anywhere else. Therefore, it is one of the *least* likely places where we would expect to find observable differences between Canadian and American gun enthusiasts.³

Web scraping is gaining recognition as a powerful research tool (Marres and Weltevrede, 2013). This technique was used to extract the textual data from these websites. All the substantive and original textual content of the politics sections of NYF and CGN that was posted between the start of 2011 through late August 2014 was extracted for analysis. This temporal range ensures that discussion prompted by significant events, such as major regulatory changes and elections, will be reflected in the data for each population. In total, 17,859,759 words were extracted and included in this analysis, 8,891,270 from CGN and 8,968,489 from NYF.

Computerized Content Analysis

Max Weber argued that one possibly fruitful way to learn more about the role the press plays in society would be to literally measure newsprint, thus he was one of, if not the earliest proponents of what we now refer to as quantitative content analysis (Weber, 2009). Since then, a number of well-known political scientists have employed, and advocated on behalf of, the method (see, e.g., A. George, 2009; A. L. George, 2009; Holsti, 1969; Lasswell, 2009). Krippendorff defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (2013:24). This study aims to recognize meaning that is revealing of the cultural environment a particular text's author is operating in (i.e., the context) by measuring the frequency of certain content characteristics.

In this study, a categorization dictionary was developed to identify the content characteristics that are relevant to the theories being evaluated. To construct a categorization dictionary the analyst develops a collection of words or phrases that are thought to represent a particular category of meaning. For example, frequent usage of words such as freedom, liberty, and rights in a policy discussion are likely to indicate that the author places significant value on political liberty. In the case of this study, these collections of words and short phrases in the several dictionaries that were developed are taken to primarily represent references to several different political values.⁴ And the frequency of references to the components of these categories is interpreted to represent the strength of those political values or ideas in the population that the text is drawn from.

³Selecting New York was guided by the crucial case research method wherein cases that are either most or least likely to fit a theory's expectations are selected (Eckstein, 1975; George and Bennett, 2005). New York is the most likely case for Grabb and Curtis. If their expectations are going to be observed anywhere, it should be there. More generally, New York is one of the U.S. states where we would expect to find the least amount of value-laden gun enthusiasm. Surely, if it is present in New York in a way that is distinguishable from Canada, then it would be present in states with more liberal gun laws and a stronger gun culture.

⁴While the most theoretically relevant categories employed by this study are designed to represent political values, a few others are included that variously represent countries, institutions, actors, or activities.

"Guns" Categorization Dictionary

Rather than explicitly deriving additional precise observable implications and hypotheses from the theories outlined above, this article allows the theories to guide the construction of the categorization dictionaries. Dictionaries were created for a total of 16 categories. Most of these directly relate to, and allow for an evaluation of, these theories.⁵

The most theoretically relevant categories for evaluating Lipset's theory are American Founding, Anti-Elitism, Control, Defiance, Rights and Liberty, and Tyranny Frame. Collectively, they assess the relevance of what Lipset terms an "American Ideology" in the data. The American Founding category measures references to the founding circumstances of the United States, principally the American Revolution. Likewise, Anti-Elitism measures the prevalence of anti-elitist sentiment in the discourse; it largely contains words and phrases that are often used to describe the upper, or ruling, classes in a pejorative sense. The Control category is related to the Anti-Elitism and Tyranny Frame categories but is more specific to the gun control issue area. Gun enthusiasts, particularly politically active ones, often express the idea that gun control has less to do with public safety and more to do with a means by which the powerful few maintain, or attempt to obtain, control over the masses (see, e.g., Beck, 2013). Unfortunately, it is very difficult to structure a dictionary capable of capturing such sentiment. The word "control" by itself is not included because it would obviously induce false positives. This category is therefore exclusively comprised of phrases that can be expected to correlate with this type of sentiment.

The Defiance category is meant to measure a willingness to shun compliance with gun control regulations. This concept appears most relevant in the gun enthusiasts' discourse in terms of registration requirements. The category therefore is composed of phrases that indicate intent to shun registration or generalized discussion about noncompliance with gun laws. It derives the majority of its theoretical relevance from Lipset's assertion that Americans are traditionally less deferential to authority than Canadians.

The Tyranny Frame category is related to the aforementioned categories and is important, as is American Founding, for evaluating the plausibility of Lipset's causal process. Politically passionate gun enthusiasts, especially in the United States, often argue that a well-armed populace serves as a check on the excesses of government and can serve to prevent the rise of a tyrannical regime (see, for instance, Horwitz and Anderson, 2009). One of the reasons this idea persists with some strength directly relates to the American Founding, and therefore Lipset, in that it is taken as an instance when the people bore their private arms to overthrow a tyrannical government.

One of the most central components of Lipset's "American Ideology" is a high regard for individual freedom. Measuring the presence of this sentiment is the purpose of the Rights and Liberty category. It is therefore composed of words and phrases likely to correlate with a strong general sense of, or desire for, individual freedom. It has been argued elsewhere that American gun owners often view their arms as physical expressions of political values, namely, individual freedom (Kohn, 2004a, 2004b); thus, the results from this category may also be taken as a partial test of that hypothesis.

⁵A complete listing of the words, phrases, or rules making up these dictionaries and a list of examples of how the categories are expressed in the text is available in an appendix available from the author upon request.

Kaufman argues that Canadian–American difference can be explained in part by the relatively greater extent to which Americans have had to fight—in both a legal and physical sense—for their property rights. Guns are, of course, useful for such a fight but they are also, of course, property, often extremely valuable property. In fact, gun regulation has historically had a very significant impact on the value of certain arms. For instance, New York’s SAFE Act expanded the definition of a prohibited assault weapon. Existing owners of these could keep them, but they were no longer transferrable. Thus, they became monetarily worthless. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that negative feelings toward gun control could be motivated by a sense that gun control infringes on one’s property rights. The Guns as Property category was therefore created to measure the extent of sentiment indicative of the idea that guns are valued simply, but not necessarily only, as a form of cherished property. Kaufman’s work would lead us to expect this category to be associated more with the American forum.

The Self-Defense and Hunting categories were included primarily because they are common justifications for gun ownership. The latter is fairly straightforward and measures references to the act of hunting wild game. The former category is straightforward in its application to the data—it is designed to measure references to armed self-defense—but much less straightforward in its interpretation. On the one hand, expressing a desire to own arms for the purposes of self-defense may reflect a perceived lack of the state’s capacity to effectively carry out its security function. On the other, it may signal an unwillingness to cede the full burden for one’s security to the state. State capacity is central to the work of Kaufman, so finding relatively more references to self-defense in the case of the United States would be supportive of his theory. Unfortunately, like their theories generally, which differ in causal process but reach many of the same conclusions, Lipset would also expect to see greater references to armed self-defense emanating from the U.S. data sources, but he would argue that this is because individualistic Americans *want* to shoulder some of the burden for their own defense.

The geographic source of the various data used in this study is the primary means by which the theory of Grabb and Curtis is being evaluated. Americans in the north-eastern United States should be nearly indistinguishable from their English-Canadian counterparts. “English Canada and the Northern United States continue to represent two kindred, if somewhat distinct, branches from the same Old English tree” (Grabb and Curtis, 2005:252). If these two groups are examined side by side, the political values expressed in debate over gun policy should be broadly similar in content and frequency. These regions are “crucial cases” for their theory, so if we are to have confidence in their approach they must be found to be highly similar (Eckstein, 1975:118; see also George and Bennett, 2005). Therefore, following Grabb and Curtis, we should expect these gun enthusiasts to express little significant difference in terms of the aforementioned categories.

The categories of Institutions of Government, Gun Rights Organizations, and Gun Control Organizations are included to measure the relevance of the political process in the minds of these gun owners. They are simply constructed of references to relevant actors and institutions. These categories will aid in knitting together and making sense of the results from other categories but they also have independent utility. Lipset and Kaufman lead us to expect that Canadians will exhibit relatively more faith in the efficacy of the political process and more trust in government in general.

The Canadian Founding category is meant to measure references to the formal founding of Canada in 1867 via the British North America Act. It is of little theoretical relevance and primarily included as a point of comparison for the American Founding category. In fact, the American Founding category is actually more theoretically relevant for the Canadian case in that Lipset would have us believe that the formal founding of America was more consequential for Canada than its own formal founding.

The Second Amendment category simply measures references to the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Its primary theoretical contribution will be to aid in interpreting the findings as a whole. This is also the case for the country reference categories. These are each designed to measure the relevance of the “other” cross-nationally.

Analysis

Every word in the relevant corpus of textual data is treated as an observation. Treating individual words as data has been demonstrated to be an efficient means for text-based analysis (Laver, Benoit, and Garry, 2003). The software derives frequency counts of references to each category by effectively replacing a component of a category, a word or phrase, with an indicator of a reference to that category.⁶ These references are analyzed in order to uncover meaningful differences in the relative proportions of references to the categories between the source forums. The statistical significance of these differences, along with their magnitude, is also assessed.

Results

Table 1 contains the resulting frequency counts along with two measures of the strength and significance of association between the category and forum. Because the total number of words that were obtained from each data source is relatively close, Table 1 lists row percent instead of the percentage of total words, which would be very small.⁷ Row percent indicates the percentage of references to that category by gun enthusiasts from a particular forum, thus they sum to 100. This is done to help the reader appreciate the distinctions displayed in this table. Tables 2 and 3 rank the categories by frequency and also display the percentage of total words for each country that represent references to that category.

These findings are clearly strongly supportive of Lipset's work. Rights and Liberty is the second most frequently referenced category on NYF—it is third for CGN—and it is significantly associated with NYF. Nearly 64 percent of all the references to this category

⁶WordStat 7 was used for this analysis. It is called by the companion program QDA Miner, which actually contains the text data. The “document” variable contains the text and the option to compare it to the country variable is selected when WordStat is called. On WordStat's dictionaries page the “Guns” categorization dictionary is selected; no other options are checked. On its options page, the option to include numeric characters is selected because some categories contain numbers. The analysis runs when the cross-tab page is selected. Frequency counts by source country are obtained by selecting “total frequency.” If an individual word is counted as a member of one category, this does not preclude it being counted as a member of another category. For instance, the word “right” is included in phrases in the Rights and Liberties (“fundamental right,” for example) category and the Guns as Property (right to property) category.

⁷Percentage of total words for each category is obtained by dividing the frequency of a category by the total words in the data from a particular forum and multiplying by 100.

TABLE 1
Category Association by Forum

Strength	Category	CGN Frequency (Row %)	NYF Frequency (Row %)	χ^2 (<i>p</i>)	Z_0 (<i>p</i> , two-tailed)
Strong NYF	Second Amendment	789 (10.71)	6,575 (89.29)	4,500.00 (0.000)	−67.07 (0.000)
	Rights and Liberty	11,557 (36.05)	20,504 (63.95)	2,400.00 (0.000)	−49.24 (0.000)
	American Founding	217 (14.08)	1,324 (85.92)	785.77 (0.000)	−28.03 (0.000)
	USA Country Reference	2,993 (38.42)	4,797 (61.58)	402.50 (0.000)	−20.06 (0.000)
	Tyranny Frame	885 (33.21)	1,780 (66.79)	292.93 (0.000)	−17.12 (0.000)
	Defiance	263 (29.99)	614 (70.01)	137.47 (0.000)	−11.72 (0.000)
	Anti-Elitism	634 (43.34)	829 (56.66)	24.33 (0.000)	−4.93 (0.000)
No statistical significance	Control	133 (46.34)	154 (53.66)	1.36 (0.243)	−1.17 (0.244)
	Gun Rights Organizations	6,152 (50.28)	6,083 (49.72)	1.22 (0.27)	1.10 (0.27)
	Hunting	6,228 (53.91)	5,324 (46.09)	78.83 (0.000)	8.88 (0.000)
	Self-Defense	2,568 (56.4)	1,985 (43.6)	79.80 (0.000)	8.93 (0.000)
	Guns as Property	1,373 (62.47)	825 (37.53)	141.43 (0.000)	11.89 (0.000)
	Canadian Founding	159 (100.00)	0 (0.00)	160.38 (0.000)	12.66 (0.000)
	Gun Control Organizations	3,853 (60.32)	2,535 (39.68)	283.56 (0.000)	16.84 (0.000)
	Institutions of Government	103,754 (57.8)	75,761 (42.2)	4,700.00 (0.000)	68.25 (0.000)
Strong CGN	Canada Country Reference	24,415 (97.99)	501 (2.01)	23,000.00 (0.000)	152.29 (0.000)

come from gun enthusiasts posting on NYF. These findings make it abundantly clear that the participants on NYF frame their political discourse in terms of individual rights and freedoms relatively more frequently than the Canadians do. This is likewise the case for Tyranny Frame, Defiance, and Anti-Elitism. Lipset argues that Americans are less deferential to authority and more hostile toward the elite than Canadians, and we observe the gun owners on these forums expressing sentiment that fits this pattern. Seventy percent of references to the Defiance category, which signals a stated willingness to not obey gun control laws, come from posters on NYF. Tyranny Frame, which goes to Lipset’s causal process, is significantly referenced in the U.S. discourse. These are references to the idea that private guns are useful as a check on the potential abuses of a tyrannical government, an idea that comports to the myth and partial reality of the American Revolution. The

TABLE 2
canadiangunnutz.com Category Frequency

Rank	Category	Frequency	Total Words (%)
1	Institutions of Government	1,03,754	1.167
2	Canada Country Reference	24,415	0.275
3	Rights and Liberty	11,557	0.130
4	Hunting	6,228	0.070
5	Gun Rights Organizations	6,152	0.069
6	Gun Control Organizations	3,853	0.043
7	USA Country Reference	2,993	0.034
8	Self-Defense	2,568	0.029
9	Guns as Property	1,373	0.015
10	Tyranny Frame	885	0.010
11	Second Amendment	789	0.009
12	Anti-Elitism	634	0.007
13	Defiance	263	0.003
14	American Founding	217	0.002
15	Canadian Founding	159	0.002
16	Control	133	0.001
Total Words		8,891,270	

TABLE 3
nyfirearms.com Category Frequency

Rank	Category	Frequency	Total Words (%)
1	Institutions of Government	75,761	0.845
2	Rights and Liberty	20,504	0.229
3	Second Amendment	6,575	0.073
4	Gun Rights Organizations	6,083	0.068
5	Hunting	5,324	0.059
6	USA Country Reference	4,797	0.053
7	Gun Control Organizations	2,535	0.028
8	Self-Defense	1,985	0.022
9	Tyranny Frame	1,780	0.020
10	American Founding	1,324	0.015
11	Anti-Elitism	829	0.009
12	Guns as Property	825	0.009
13	Defiance	614	0.007
14	Canada Country Reference	501	0.006
15	Control	154	0.002
16	Canadian Founding	0	0.000
Total Words		8,968,489	

founding of America is, not surprisingly, clearly of great relevance in the American data and outranks Canadian Founding in the minds of the Canadian gun owners; this comports with Lipset's argument that the American Revolution actually founded two countries. The Control category is not significantly associated with either forum. However, it is simply not a popular category on either forum. It is possible that this sentiment is simply hard to

measure. All in all, these findings are very supportive of Lipset's argument and they lend plausibility to his causal process.

The Guns as Property category does not perform as Kaufman would expect. Americans, according to him, are supposed to be quick to recognize violations of their property rights and vigorous in their defense. However, this evidence suggests that this most accurately describes Canadians, at least when it comes to guns. Canadians, who, as Kaufman would argue, have traditionally had reason to place faith in the state to protect their property, are significantly associated with the idea that guns are themselves simply property. These findings strongly suggest that Canadians seem to be having a discourse that regards gun control as an encroachment on their right to property, while the Americans seem to view it more as an infringement on more general rights, individual freedoms, and even autonomy. Given the topical focus of these sites and the interests of their users, it is reasonable to conclude that Canadians resistant to gun control view it as a threat to their cherished property and this sentiment likely serves as the basis for much of that resistance.

The work of both Lipset and Kaufman would lead us to expect that Self-Defense should be more associated with the United States, albeit for different reasons, but the data do not bear this expectation out. What the finding about self-defense, as well as hunting and the category relating to property, does tell us is that guns seem to be viewed in more instrumental terms among the Canadians. Taken as a whole, these results suggest that the discourse about gun policy centers more on what guns *do* for Canadian gun enthusiasts and is more about what guns *represent* for the New York gun enthusiasts.

These findings do not bode well at all for Grabb and Curtis. They would expect that New Yorkers should be as similar to Canadians as any American could be. Furthermore, independent of nationality, the users of these sites, fundamentally gun enthusiasts, would be remarkably similar on a host of demographic factors: male, white, middle-aged, relatively rural, etc. (Buckner, 1994; Pew Research Center, 2013). There are many reasons why we should have expected to not have found such a significant difference in the way these two groups talk about gun-related politics.

While CGN is not as tightly focused geographically as NYF, it is an English-language website and a significant proportion of the users obviously indicate being from Ontario. The only location data available are self-reported and free form. These data were extracted and examined but they are of only limited utility. For instance, users report being from places called "Amazing Grace" and "Hell Raising." These data were examined for all obvious references to Ontario; roughly 20 percent of the participants on CGN list a location that is indicative of their residence in Ontario. Since gun ownership is least common in Ontario (Block, 1998), this figure is not surprising. However, even if one accepts that the vast majority of the participants on this site are from the other English-speaking regions of Canada, the negative conclusions for Grabb and Curtis hold. Some may argue that a Canadian gun forum will be dominated by westerners, Albertans in particular. If this is the case, here we would have even more reason to expect little difference in the proportion of references to most of these categories. In terms of political culture, Albertans tend to resemble Americans more than Canadians in other regions do (Wiseman, 2007).

These findings also clearly indicate an unusual preoccupation with a neighboring country, one that is not reciprocated. A considerable number of the conversations that occur on CGN concern the United States, while Canada is comparatively irrelevant on NYF. As one would expect, the USA Country Reference and Second Amendment categories are more

associated with NYF than CGN but they are referenced to a notable extent, especially USA Country Reference, on CGN. Although Canadians have famously been described as the oldest anti-Americans (Underhill, 1960), it is likely that these particular Canadians, gun enthusiasts, are referencing the United States more with envy than with scorn. This may indeed help explain the frequency of references to armed self-defense on the Canadian forum. This is a legally tenuous issue in Canada so it would not be surprising if these gun enthusiasts are referencing the issue in America.

Given the political nature of this discourse, it is not surprising that the Institutions of Government category and the categories that refer to relevant interest groups appear frequently in the data for both countries. What is interesting is how much more Gun Control Organizations and Institutions of Government are associated with CGN than with NYF. In the first place, this seems to indicate that Canadian gun enthusiasts feel threatened more by gun control interest groups than their American counterparts do. This lends support to existing work demonstrating that gun control groups hold the balance of power in Canada while gun rights groups dominate in the United States (Fleming, 2012). The finding that Canadians are significantly more associated with references to governmental institutions is yet another point lending general support to the expectations of Lipset, and by extension Kaufman, thereby representing a further indictment of Grabb and Curtis. This finding suggests that the political process is more relevant to the Canadians than the New Yorkers, possibly indicating a stronger trust in government, which would be consistent with Lipset's work.

Discussion

Lipset's observable implications receive strong support and there is evidence suggestive of the relevance of his causal process. The findings for Kaufman are mixed. On the one hand, since he expects to observe much of what Lipset does, some support is found. However, since viewing guns as property was found to be more relevant to the Canadian users and the institutions of government also seem to be more relevant to them, it is difficult to say that Kaufman's work finds much support here. There is simply no meaningful support whatsoever for Grabb and Curtis.

These results seem to point toward the presence of a key point of distinction that sets these two groups apart and very likely distinguishes many American gun owners from their Canadian counterparts. As revealed by their discussions, the Canadians seem to value guns mostly as instruments of utility and Americans, while clearly not ignoring their utility, seem to place more emphasis on what guns immaterially represent. Aside from their role as tools of insurrection, every instrumental purpose for gun ownership that was included in this evaluation is more associated with the Canadian gun enthusiasts. Alternatively, every nonintrinsic value group that was measured here stacks up on the American side. Surveys of American gun owners have consistently found that instrumental purposes are most commonly cited to justify gun ownership (see, e.g., Pew Research Center, 2013), but these results suggest that there may be an underlying motivation, possibly even below the level of consciousness. A prospective American gun buyer is certainly more likely to respond to inquiries about the purpose of the arm he seeks by saying that he will hunt or protect his home with it than by saying that he feels he needs one in order to be free. But these findings suggest that when the topic shifts to loss rather than acquisition—when there

are threats to the continued possession of that arm, as there were in the period covered by these data—then a sense that the American's freedom is threatened is aroused in him while the Canadian fears the loss of his property and ability to chase game.

The final point that should be discussed before we move on deals with the apparent relevance of Lipset's causal process, the founding of America. A common criticism of Lipset and work like his focuses on the difficulty they face in explaining the journey from A to B: How exactly, for example, does a founding event centuries in the past account for the present (see, for instance, Conway, 1991)? While there are certainly more popular categories, the American Founding category is referenced, by both Americans and Canadians, to a degree that is clearly beyond what we should naturally expect. Why should events of the late 18th century appear with such frequency in conversations taking place in the early 21st century? These results suggest that the answer is rather simple: because they are *seen as relevant*. Indeed, when the results of the Tyranny Frame category are interpreted in combination with American Founding, it seems that the values and circumstances of the American Revolution are in the forefront of the minds of these gun enthusiasts. Their understanding of this era clearly seems associated with how they view America's relationship with private arms.

Conclusion and Implications for Gun Politics

Why is the United States so exceptionally resistant to gun control? By focusing not on the population at large but on a particularly salient subsection of it, the intense minority that drives this resistance, this article points toward an important component that a complete answer to this question must factor in: to many American gun owners, a significant portion of the population (McCarthy, 2014), guns are not simply tools or property. They are viewed as physical manifestations of deeply held political values. Moreover, this article demonstrates that some of the most relevant political values that guns represent are central to common views of what has variously been termed the American creed or ideology: individual freedom, self-reliance, anti-elitism, and a suspicion of the state.

The implications of these findings build upon existing explanations for American resistance to gun control. Fleming argues that the United States has not been able to tighten gun regulations in the wake of mass shootings, while Canada has, because of the interaction of the strength of the National Rifle Association and the bifurcated nature of our political institutions. This article helps explain the source of the NRA's strength and the intensity of that strength. Fleming (2012:36), building on Dahl (1956), discusses the power that intense minorities, combined with relatively apathetic majorities, can have in a democracy. Such a combination can lead to "minority tyranny." Finding that the NRA's base views their arms as physical manifestations of political values helps explain this intensity. The NRA's Canadian counterpart, the National Firearms Association, is not so advantaged. The NFA cannot successfully adopt the NRA's rhetoric because it is unlikely to resonate with its base, much less with the broader Canadian population, because that value-laden rhetoric is not consistent with the Canadian identity. Given all of this, while only a minority may support the American gun lobby's agenda, due to the persistent influence of an American political culture with revolutionary origins, it is an intense minority and therefore powerful.

This finding creates at least two vexing problems for those seeking modernization of the U.S. gun control regime. First, gun rights advocates argue from an advantaged position.

They are naturally able to frame the discussion in terms of values that are widely supported, in fact seen as definitional, among the American populace. The National Rifle Association's power does not simply reside in its lobbying prowess, it lies in the fact that it can claim to be freedom's protector and that message resonates regardless of issue area. Second, since guns are not simply viewed as physical objects, it is more difficult to argue for regulating them in the manner that other physical objects, automobiles, for example, are regulated. Threats to the objects are perceived as threats to the values they embody. Proposals to register firearms, for instance, are seen as proposals to register the value. Likewise, discussing banning the object, or a particular class of it, is likely to be interpreted as talk of banning the deeply held political value the object represents. This fuels the intensity of the minority of Americans opposed to gun control, thereby enhancing their power. Whether or not one is pleased with the state of gun control in the United States, we must all recognize that these issues truly make the American gun debate exceptional.

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