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East Tennessee State University Student Perceptions of Gun Legislation

By

Brieann Elizabeth Boyle

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the

University Honors Scholars Program

Honors College

And the

Honors-in-Discipline Criminal Justice Program

College of Arts and Sciences

East Tennessee State University

Abstract

Many Americans are pushing for legislation supporting increased gun control; however many critics argue that increasing gun control will limit Americans' rights as defined in the Second Amendment. With Tennessee's passing of the Constitutional Carry, the researcher found it relevant to build on past research and to evaluate East Tennessee State University students' perceptions of current Tennessee gun legislation in the light of this new act. East Tennessee State University students were surveyed in-person about their perceptions and knowledge of the current Tennessee gun legislation and support for gun control. No significant relationship was found between major and knowledge of Tennessee's gun legislation, support of gun control, or handgun carry permit respectively. However, a statistically significant relationship between completion of firearm safety course and major was found; and a negative correlation between support for gun control and knowledge of gun legislation was found as well. Although there are no policy implications as a result of this study, Criminal Justice programs should evaluate their programs to ensure that their students are being informed and retaining their education on current firearm legislation.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Second Amendment gives Americans the Constitutional Rights to bear arms. Many Americans are pushing for legislation supporting increased gun control; however many critics argue that increasing gun control will limit Americans' rights as defined in the Second Amendment. The Southern area of the United States has historically been against increasing gun control, in fact, recently Tennessee has even passed the controversial Constitutional Carry, which allows for any individual twenty-one or older to carry handguns without a permit. Although past literature has assessed students' perceptions of gun legislation, additional research is needed in the Southern area of the United States on current gun legislature, especially in Tennessee since passing the Constitutional Carry (Bishop, 2019; Kruis et al., 2019; Wallace, 2019). The current study seeks to examine East Tennessee State University students' perceptions of Tennessee gun legislature.

This paper will be comprised of five sections. Chapter Two will provide a review of the State of Tennessee's current gun legislature and a relevant literature review. Chapter Three will show the methods used to conduct this study, specifically the data collection, variables, and statistically techniques utilized. Chapter Four will provide the results with an emphasis on any significant findings. Finally, Chapter Five will contain a discussion that examines the findings and results, limitations of the study, suggest recommendations for future research, and potential implications due to the findings.

There are multiple gaps and limitations in past research performed on college students' perceptions of gun legislation. To the best of the authors' knowledge, there have been no

previous studies looking at the correlation between support and knowledge of gun legislation with regards to major. The purpose of the current study is to add to the current literature and cover areas that past studies have missed, specifically with criminal justice students. In the next section of this paper, a review of Tennessee gun legislature, Tennessee handgun permits, and relevant literature will be presented to lay out the framework of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevant Gun Legislature

Types of Permits

In the state of Tennessee there are five different types of handgun permits: Enhanced Handgun Carry Permit, Concealed Handgun Carry Permit, Lifetime (Enhanced Only), Retired Law Enforcement Lifetime, and Temporary Permits (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”).

Enhanced Handgun Carry Permits allow for open or concealed carry for any handgun that the permittee legally owns or has in their possession (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). This permit expires after eight years. The training requirements for the Enhanced Handgun Carry Permit are one of the following: completion of an eight-hour handgun safety course, P.O.S.T certification, completion of a Law Enforcement Training Academy, Armed Guard training, employee of the Department of Corrections, or proof of military handgun training (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). Permittees are required to keep the permit on them when carrying and are required to show permit if required by law enforcement officers.

Concealed Handgun Carry Permit only allows for concealed carry (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). Permit holders are not allowed to carry at schools or universities. This permit expires after eight years (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). To hold this permit, a named based background check will run every five years (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). Additionally, a CCP Proof of Training form must be submitted along with training proof. Firearms training that can be accepted for this permit: military training, a valid TN Handgun Carry Permit, active law enforcement training course, hunter education/safety course, firearms safety/training course from an organization dealing with firearm training, firearm safety course for law enforcement, or an online course from organizations that are certified by TDOSHS (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). For online firearms training/safety courses, certain qualifications need to be met to meet the TDOSHS guidelines. In the course, topics such as proper handling/storage of firearms and ammunition, firearm safety rules, handgun uses, features, basic skills and techniques, safe cleaning, transportation, and storage methods must be thoroughly explained (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). Additionally, current state laws on handguns needs to be covered as well. The course cannot be less than 90 minutes in length and must require a test or quiz that confirms the information was learned (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). Also, the online course must provide a printable certificate of completion.

Lifetime (Enhanced Only) Permits allow for open or concealed carry and have no expiration date (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). The permittee can carry any handgun but must always have their permit on them when carrying and are required to display the permit when required by law enforcement. A background check based

on name will be ran every five years (Department of Saftey & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). Training requirements are the same as the regular Enhanced Handgun Carry Permit, which requires completion of an eight-hour handgun saftey course, P.O.S.T certification, completion of a Law Enforcement Training Academy, Armed Guard training, employee of the Department of Corrections, or proof of military handgun training (Department of Saftey & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”).

Retired Law Enforcement Lifetime permits are for formal federal, state, or local law enforcement officers (Department of Saftey & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). To obtain this permit, the Verification of Retired Police Officer for Lifetime Handgun Carry Permit form must be completed or a formal letter from the law enforcement agency can be submitted. The Handgun Carry Permit application and proof of U.S. Citizenship or Lawful Permanent Residency must be submitted to receive this permit (Department of Saftey & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). Fingerprints are also required for this permit.

Temporary Permits are for those who have an Order of Protection (Department of Saftey & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). Twenty-one days after the Order of Protection is granted, those who have an order of protection can carry a handgun if they legally own the firearm and always keep a copy of the Protective Order on them. To receive this permit, an in-person application is required along with a certified copy of the Order of Protection, proof of identity, and proof of residency (Department of Saftey & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). Additionally, all other qualifications for a Handgun Carry Permit must be met as well. A criminal history check is required for this permit (Department of Saftey & Homeland Security, “*Handgun Permit Types*”). This permit is valid only in Tennessee for sixty days and does not have a photograph.

Eligibility Requirements

Although the different permits require different eligibility requirements, there are general requirements for all permits (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Eligibility Requirements*”). To apply for a permit, proof of U.S. Citizenship or Lawful Permanent Residency is required. Additionally, applicants are required to be a resident of the state of Tennessee (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Eligibility Requirements*”). Applicants must be twenty-one years old or eighteen and be a good-standing veteran or be in the Armed Forces on active duty. Permit applicants must not be prohibited from buying or owning a handgun in other states or Tennessee (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Eligibility Requirements*”). Applicants cannot have a felony conviction, Class A misdemeanor conviction, be convicted of domestic violence, or have a pending charge for domestic violence, be convicted of stalking or have a pending charge for stalking, have a restraining order filed against them, or have an Order of Protection filed against them (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Eligibility Requirements*”). Applicants must not be a fugitive, an illegal alien, or renounced their United States citizenship. Applicants must not have been dishonorably charged from the Armed Forces (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Eligibility Requirements*”). Applicants must not have been a patient in a rehabilitation program, hospitalized for controlled substances or alcohol, been convicted of two or more DUIs in the last ten years, be currently going to court because of a DUI, or be receiving social security disability benefits due to alcohol or drug dependence (Department of Safety & Homeland Security, “*Eligibility Requirements*”). Applicants cannot have been hospitalized in a mental institution, be mental defective, have a court appoint a conservator due to mental defect, be disabled due to mental incapacity, be

considered by the courts to be capable of serious harm due to mental illness for the past seven years, or be receiving social security disability benefits due to mental disability.

Ineligibility to Possess a Firearm

Federal laws prohibit those who have been convicted of a felony, domestic violence misdemeanors, or have court orders related to serious mental conditions to possess firearms (Giffords Law Center, 2021j). Tennessee laws elaborates into more specifics of who is legally allowed to possess a firearm. In the state of Tennessee, felony charges related to use of force, violence, deadly weapon, and drug offenses make a person ineligible to possess a firearm (Giffords Law Center, 2021j). Although it is a right to bear arms, anyone with a felony is prohibited from possessing a handgun in Tennessee (Giffords Law Center, 2021y). Those who have an active order of protection against them are prohibited to possess a firearm (Giffords Law Center, 2021j). Those who are affected by controlled substances are ineligible to possess a handgun.

Mental Health

It is illegal for people who have been classified as a danger to themselves or others to own firearms or ammunition (Giffords Law Center, 2020b). Additionally, federal law does not allow people who have been involuntarily hospitalized to a mental treatment facility to possess firearms. Tennessee law requires mental health records to be submitted to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System database (Giffords Law Center, 2020b). These reports must include all the names the individual associates with themselves, the individual's social security number, date of birth, race, sex and the name of the hospital or treatment resource that the individual was committed to. Additionally, the docket or case number or the adjudication or

judicial commitment and the date judicial commitment was ordered also needs to be reported in the report (Giffords Law Center, 2020b). If a person who is ineligible to purchase firearms attempts to make a purchase, a law enforcement officer will begin an investigation to see if there was a law violation. The state of Tennessee does allow for a petition process for individuals who are unable to possess firearms due to mental health-related reasons after seven years have passed from the date of release from the treatment facility or the date of the adjudication order (Giffords Law Center, 2020b). When an open proceeding occurs, evidence such as the circumstances surrounded the disability, mental health records, criminal history, reputation, and changes in the petitioner's mental condition or circumstances are considered. If the court finds that the petitioner is not likely to act in a dangerous manner and public interest would not be harmed if relief was granted, the petition for relief will be granted (Giffords Law Center, 2020b).

Domestic Violence

The State of Tennessee prohibits those convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence or stalking to own a firearm (Giffords Law Center, 2021g; Giffords Law Center, 2021j). It is also an offense for someone who has been convicted of the misdemeanor to attempt to purchase a firearm. After being convicted of a domestic violence offense, the offender has forty-eight hours to surrender their firearms by either selling them or giving them to a third party (Giffords Law Center, 2021g; Giffords Law Center, 2021k). Additionally, an affidavit must be signed with the offender acknowledging that they no longer possess any firearms. Persons who have a restraining order placed against them are also unable to purchase or possess firearms either temporarily or permanently (Giffords Law Center, 2021g). After the order of protection has expired, they can potentially be legally allowed to purchase or possess firearms again. If the police are at the scene of a domestic violence incident, all firearms that the perpetrator used,

threatened to use, and are in plain sight must be seized for protection (Giffords Law Center, 2021g).

Regulation of Ammunition

The state of Tennessee does not require buyers to keep a record of purchasers of ammunition (Giffords Law Center, 2021b). Licenses are not required to buy ammunition in the state of Tennessee and safe storage of ammunition is not required. Bullets that are designed to explode on impact are not legally allowed to be sold, displayed, manufactured, or used in Tennessee (Giffords Law Center, 2021b). Additionally, some armor-piercing ammunition is prohibited as well. It is illegal in Tennessee for ammunition sellers to sell to intoxicated buyers.

Machine Guns

It is against Tennessee law to intentionally know, make, move, repair, or sell machine guns (Giffords Law Center, 2020a). If a person does possess a machine gun, federal law requires a valid registration with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives (ATF). According to federal law, it is prohibited to transfer or possess a machine gun that has been made after May 19, 1986, or to possess bumper stocks (Giffords Law Center, 2020a). In the state of Tennessee, the purchaser of a machine gun must have all documentation submitted within fifteen business days.

Process of Legally Purchasing a Firearm

Before the firearm dealer can deliver the firearm to the purchaser, the dealer must get the purchaser's current identification, complete a firearm transaction record with signatures, request a criminal history record check from the TBI regarding the purchaser, and record the approval number from the TBI on the transaction record (Giffords Law Center, 2021e; Giffords Law

Center 2021t). Federal law requires background checks before the purchase of a firearm at a license firearm dealer (Giffords Law Center, 2021e). Buyers must have valid identification to purchase the gun from a dealer (Giffords Law Center, 2021z). Firearm sellers who are not federally licensed dealers are not required to conduct background checks according to Tennessee State Law (Giffords Law Center, 2021e; Giffords Law Center, 2021aa).

In the state of Tennessee, the firearms dealer must contact the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation to initiate the background check (Giffords Law Center, 2021e). The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation will enforce the federal purchaser prohibitions. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation may require thumbprints of the purchaser. TBI will deny firearm transfers if the purchaser has been charged with a crime that would make them ineligible to purchase a firearm. However, the TBI can reverse this denial if there is no final disposition information available or if the purchaser challenges a denial and there are no records of the final disposition information that can be found within 15 days (Giffords Law Center, 2021e). If the gun dealer is dealt a subpoena or a search warrant, they must provide the records of transfers of firearms (Giffords Law Center, 2021t).

If a person who has been prohibited from purchasing guns due to mental health reason attempts to buy a firearm, TBI must contact within twenty-four hours a law enforcement officer to investigate a possible violation of the law (Giffords Law Center, 2021e). The seller may face felony charges (Giffords Law Center, 2021aa). Tennessee state law does not allow anyone to sell firearm or ammunition to an intoxicated person (Giffords Law Center, 2021aa). In the State of Tennessee, it is a misdemeanor to transfer a firearm to someone who the court has deemed mentally incapacitated (Giffords Law Center, 2021z).

Licensure of Firearm Dealers

Firearm dealers must be licensed through the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives (ATF) (Giffords Law Center, 2021I). However, the state of Tennessee does not require firearm dealers to also get a state license. Firearm dealers in Tennessee still do have to follow specific laws such as completing background checks on buyers, ensuring that buyers own a locking device, and keep detailed records of firearm sales (Giffords Law Center, 2021I). Tennessee has no law requiring a waiting period prior to buying a firearm (Giffords Law Center, 2021bb). Gun owners or sellers are not required to obtain a license under Tennessee State Law (Giffords Law Center, 2021r).

Carrying Specifications

Tennessee allows for handgun carry permit owners to openly carry loaded handguns (Giffords Law Center, 2021w). Tennessee allows unloaded rifles, shotguns, and handguns to be open carried without a license if there is not ammunition for the weapon in the area. However, in the state of Tennessee, the “possession of a firearm with the intent to go armed” is prohibited (Giffords Law Center, 2021w). Tennessee allows anyone over twenty-one to publicly carry a handgun without a permit if the gun is possessed lawfully (Giffords Law Center, 2021u).

Firearms in Vehicles

Any person can carry a firearm in their motor vehicle if they are not prohibited from owning or buying a firearm (Giffords Law Center, 2021p). Handgun carry permit holders are permitted to keep their firearms in their vehicles on private or public property if the firearm is kept out of eyesight and in a locked compartment that is connected to the vehicle. Disciplinary action against employees and students of public post-secondary institutions who chose to keep a firearm or ammunition in their vehicle are prohibited (Giffords Law Center, 2021p). Also,

Tennessee law does not allow employers to stop employees from having firearms lawfully stored in their vehicle on the company's property.

Public Establishment Prohibitions

If a person carries in a public establishment that serves alcohol, they are not legally allowed to consume alcoholic beverages (Giffords Law Center, 2021s). Firearms are prohibited from judicial buildings. Individual corporations and businesses can prohibit the possession of firearms, but notice must be appropriately posted (Giffords Law Center, 2021s). Handguns are allowed to be carried on public parks, civic centers, playgrounds, or other recreational grounds that the state government operates, but not all firearms.

Juvenile Possession

It is illegal for juveniles to knowingly possess a handgun under Tennessee State Law (Giffords Law Center, 2021v). No firearms are allowed to be distributed to a minor except for hunting or sporting activity. Additionally, Tennessee law prohibits selling handguns to a juvenile (Giffords Law Center, 2021v). However, in Tennessee there is no minimum age for owning rifles and shotguns.

Parent Liability

In Tennessee, it is illegal for parents to knowingly, intentionally, or recklessly allow a child to possess a handgun or provide the child with a handgun if the parent knows there is a risk that the child will be committing a felony with the handgun (Giffords Law Center, 2021f). Additionally, the state of Tennessee prohibits legal guardians from allowing or failing to report to law enforcement or school officials their child going onto the premises of a public or private

school while in illegal possession of a firearm. Other than those two instances, adults who allow children to have access to firearms are free of criminal liability (Giffords Law Center, 2021f).

School Property

In the state of Tennessee, firearms are prohibited in public or private school property, unless private schools implement a policy allowing handguns to be carried in some instances (Giffords Law Center, 2021o). However, if the firearm is to be used for instructional or ceremonial purposes, then they are allowed on the property. Additionally, non-student adults may keep a firearm in their private vehicle (Giffords Law Center, 2021o). Tennessee law does not require but does allow for off-duty law enforcement officers to be school security officers while children are in regular school hours and during school sponsored events. If an employee allowed to carry a concealed handgun, they may do so at a public institution of higher education (Giffords Law Center, 2021o). However, if the employee does decide to carry a handgun, written notice must be given to the institution's law enforcement. Public and private schools must have signage communicating that it is a felony to carry weapons on school property (Giffords Law Center, 2021o). Under Tennessee law, it is illegal for school administrators to request information from students and families regarding firearm ownership. Additionally, school employees are not required to provide information about firearm ownership (Giffords Law Center, 2021o). Also, disciplinary action against a student or employee over firearm ownership is prohibited. Elementary schools may offer a non-required gun safety class from a local education agency for students enrolled in the school, however no live ammunition or live fire can be present or be used (Giffords Law Center, 2021o).

Other Regulations/Laws

The state of Tennessee has no laws regulating fifty caliber firearms (Giffords Law Center, 2021a), assault weapons (Giffords Law Center, 2021c), junk guns or unsafe firearms (Giffords Law Center, 2021g), large capacity ammunition magazines (Giffords Law Center, 2021q), gun shows (Giffords Law Center, 2021n), or firearm registration (Giffords Law Center, 2021x). Tennessee has no extreme risk protection order law (Giffords Law Center, 2021i). According to the Tennessee General Assembly, the design, advertising, making, and selling of firearms and ammunition to the public are not unreasonably dangerous activities (Giffords Law Center, 2021m). Tennessee has a stand your ground law. This law does not require retreating before using deadly force for self-defense (Giffords Law Center, 2021d). This law only applies if the person is not participating in illegal activity.

Existing Literature

Research done by Bishop (2019) examined possible relationships between perceptions of safety and support for concealed carry on campus. This research found that there was no significant relationship between perceptions of safety on campus and the presence of concealed weapons on campus. However, the study did find that males were more likely than females to support concealed carry on campus (Bishop, 2019). There was a correlation between gun ownership and support for concealed carry on campus. Those who owned a concealed carry permit were more supportive of concealed carry on campus than those who did not have a permit (Bishop, 2019).

Wallace (2019) conducted research on college student perceptions of social rewards and cost from carrying guns. This study hypothesized that white males are more likely to be willing to carry a gun on campus if they were in a region with higher gun ownership and if they had a history of victimization. Additionally, this study also hypothesized that students who believe that

gun are a benefit to society are more likely to report that they would carry a gun on campus (Wallace, 2019). The last hypothesis from the author examined the effect of friendship on gun carry on campus. This study found that more males associate a benefit with carrying on campus than females (Wallace, 2019). Those attending school in the South agreed that it was socially desirable to carry on campus. This study also found that those who believed that there was a social benefit to carrying a gun on campus also were more likely to carry a weapon and report that their friends would also be willing to carry if they did (Wallace, 2019). This research showed that there is an effect of social pressures, such as friends, that increases gun carrying on campus.

Research done by Kruis et al. (2019) examined characteristics of student gun owners, predictors of attitudes towards gun control support in students, and predictors of students' attitudes towards staff carrying. Specifically looking at college students enrolled in universities in the Northeastern and Midwestern areas of the United States, Kruis et al (2019) found that most students supported faculty and staff campus carry and were against stricter gun control. This study also found that the students that were more knowledgeable about gun legislation and gun crimes are less likely to support gun control.

It will be important to compare the findings of these studies (Bishop, 2019; Kruis et al., 2019; Wallace, 2019) with the findings from the current study, which examines students' knowledge and perceptions of gun legislature across majors. This study is important because of the location of the population that participated in this study is from the Southern area of the United States. To the best of the authors' knowledge, there have been no previous studies looking at the correlation between support and knowledge of gun legislation in the Southern area of the United States. While this section discussed existing literature regarding Tennessee gun

legislature and reviewed existing literature on student perceptions of gun legislature, the next section will discuss the methodology utilized in the current study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Hypotheses

This study examines East Tennessee State University students' perceptions of Tennessee Gun legislature. The principal variables of interest are knowledge on gun legislature and support of gun control laws, in relationship with type of major. Additional variables include handgun permits, gun safety course, demographic variables, and firearm ownership. The hypotheses for this study are as follows:

H1: Criminal justice students are less likely to support gun control laws than other majors.

H2: Criminal justice students are more knowledgeable about gun laws than other majors.

H3: Criminal justice students are more likely to have completed a gun safety course than other majors.

H4: Criminal justice students are more likely to have a handgun permit than students in other majors.

H5: Students who have more knowledge about gun legislature are less likely to favor gun control.

Research Design

This study was conducted at East Tennessee State University, a public university located in Johnson City, Tennessee. The sample for this study was a convenience sample, as the researcher had easy access to the student population at this university. This study consisted of

quantitative research acquired through a paper survey handed out in classes on campus. The survey was handed out to students in select criminal justice, sociology, and anthropology classes. These classes were determined by contacting the administrative aid for each department and creating a list of professors teaching in-person classes. From that point, the researcher emailed many professors and surveyed classes until the sample size was exceeded. When surveying the class, the researcher read aloud the entirety of the informed consent document and explained how to fold the survey so that the answers were completely anonymous. The first page of the survey was the informed consent that was read aloud along with a selection for “I AGREE” and “I DO NOT AGREE” for the following statements: “I have read the above information, I agree to volunteer, I am at least 18 years old, I am physically present in the United States, and I am currently enrolled at East Tennessee State University”. This study was anonymous. This study was granted Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and was determined to be exempted. The questions in the survey included demographic information, Likert scale opinion-based questions on gun control, and a true/false section on Tennessee gun legislature.

Variables

Variables of interest in this study include support for gun control, student knowledge of Tennessee firearm legislature, possession of a carry permit, and completion of a firearm safety course. These variables have differing levels of measurement and are in Table 1. Some of the variables have a ratio measurement, such as support for gun control and knowledge of Tennessee firearm legislature, while possession of a carry permit, completion of a firearm safety course, gender, major, and firearm ownership are nominal. Age is ordinal. In the hypotheses presented above, the independent variables include gender, major, age, firearm ownership, possession of a handgun permit, and completion of a firearm safety course depending on the hypothesis. The

dependent variables in the hypotheses above include support for gun control and knowledge of Tennessee firearm legislature depending on the hypothesis.

Table 1.

Variables Table

Variables of Interest	Level of Measurement	Attributes of Variable of Interest
Support for gun control	Ratio	-12, -11, -10, -9, -8, -7, -6, -5, -4, -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12
Knowledge of Tennessee firearm legislature	Ratio	0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8
Possession of a carry permit	Nominal	Yes, I currently have one; No, I am under 21 but I will not get one when I am old enough to meet the age requirements; No, I am under 21 but will get one when I am old enough to meet the age requirements; No, I am 21 or older and do not have a handgun carry permit; I am currently in the process of getting my handgun carry permit; Other
Completion of a firearm safety course	Nominal	Yes, No
Gender	Nominal	Yes, No
Major	Nominal	Yes, No
Age	Ordinal	18-20, 21+
Firearm ownership	Nominal	Yes, No

Creating the Scores for Gun Control Support

Questions 8 through 13 dealt with students' perceptions of gun control. A Likert scale was used as the response to six statements discussing gun legislature. Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree were the options provided. All answers that were strongly agree were given +2 points, agree +1 point, neither agree nor disagree received 0 points, disagree -1 point, and strongly disagree -2 points. The range of scores for this variable is -12 to 12. From these six questions and responses comes a numerical score which was used in the statistical analysis.

Creating the Scores for Tennessee Gun Legislation Knowledge

Questions 15 through 22 asked about students existing knowledge. The responses for these questions were True or False. The correct answer has a numerical value of 1 and the incorrect answer has a value of 0. The range of scores for this variable is 0 to 8. From these eight questions and responses, a numerical score is made which was used in the statistical analysis.

The score was the number of questions correct.

Data Analysis Plan

Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated to test the linear correlation between two distinct variables. SPSS was used to determine the strength of this relationship, if a statistically significant relationship is found. For some hypotheses, an Independent Samples *t*-Test was conducted to determine if the null or research hypotheses were more likely to occur. Measures of central tendency and frequencies were also calculated. To make statistical analyses simpler, the variable handgun carry permit was collapsed into two distinct attributes: "I currently have, am in the process of getting, or will get a carry permit" and "I do not have or will not get a carry

permit". The "I currently have, am in the progress of getting, or will get a carry permit" was made up of the attributes of "Yes, I currently have one", "No, I am under 21 but will get one when I am old enough to meet the age requirements", and "I am currently in the process of getting my handgun carry permit". The "I do not have or will not get a carry permit" was made up of the attributes of "No, I am under 21 but will not get one when I am old enough to meet the age requirements" and "No, I am 21 or older and do not have a handgun carry permit". Each missing variable was excluded from statistical analysis. The scale used to measure gun control support was analyzed for reliability using Cronbach's alpha.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics

The result from the survey were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Seventy-two respondents, or 69.9%, identified as female; thirty respondents, or 29.1%, identified as male; 1 respondent, or 1%, identified as another gender (see Table 2). The respondent who identified as another gender did not specify which gender they identified as. The mode value for Gender was Female.

Table 2.*Frequencies for Gender*

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Female	72	69.9	69.9
Male	30	29.1	29.1
Other	1	1.0	1.0
Total	103	100	100

Fifty-four respondents, or 52.4% of the sample, were ages 18-20 and forty-nine respondents, or 47.6% of the sample, were ages twenty-one or older (See Table 3).

Table 3.*Frequencies for Age*

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
18-20	54	52.4	52.4
21+	49	47.6	47.6
Total	103	100	100

Fifty-eight of the respondents, 56.3% of the sample, were criminal justice majors; forty-three of the respondents, 43.7% of the sample, were non-criminal justice majors (See Table 4).

Table 4.

Frequencies of Majors

Major	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Criminal Justice	58	56.3	56.3
Other	45	43.7	43.7
Total	103	100	100

Ten respondents, 9.7% of the sample, currently had a handgun carry permit; twenty-six respondents, 25.2% of the sample, were under 21 and did not currently possess a handgun carry permit, and are not planning on getting a handgun permit when they meet the age requirements; 25.2% of the sample, were under 21 and did not have a handgun carry permit, but are planning on getting one when they meet the age requirements; thirty-six respondents, 35% of the sample, were over 21 and did not have a handgun carry permit; five respondents, 4.9% of the sample, were in the process of getting their handgun carry permit (see Table 5).

Table 5.

Frequencies of Handgun Carry Permits

Handgun Carry Permit	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes, I currently have one	10	9.7	9.7
No, I am under 21 but I will not get one when I am old enough to meet the age requirements	26	25.2	25.2
No, I am under 21 but will get one when I am old enough to meet the age requirements	26	25.2	25.2
No, I am 21 or older and do not have a handgun carry permit	36	35	35
I am currently in the process of getting my handgun carry permit	5	4.9	4.9
Total	103	100	100

Thirty-eight respondents, 36.9% of the sample, have taken a gun safety course; sixty-five respondents, 63.1% of the sample, have not taken a gun safety course (see Table 6).

Table 6.

Frequencies for Gun Safety Course

Gun Safety Course	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	38	36.9	36.9
No	65	63.1	63.1
Total	103	100	100

Twenty-six respondents, 25.2% of the sample, own a firearm; seventy-six respondents, 73.8% of the sample, do not own a firearm, one respondent did not answer this question (see Table 7).

Table 7.

Frequencies of Firearm Ownership

Firearm Ownership	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	26	25.2	25.5
No	76	73.8	74.5
Total	102	99	100
Missing	1	1	
Total	103	100	

Seven respondents, 6.8% of the sample size, strongly agreed with the statement “I am knowledgeable about current Tennessee gun legislature”; thirty-six respondents, 35% of the sample size, agreed with the statement “I am knowledgeable about current Tennessee gun legislature”; thirty-two respondents, 31.1% of the sample size, neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement “I am knowledgeable about current Tennessee gun legislature”; twenty-two respondents, 21.4% of the sample size, disagreed with the statement “I am knowledgeable about current Tennessee gun legislature”; six respondents, 5.8% of the sample size, strongly disagreed with the statement “I am knowledgeable about current Tennessee gun legislature” (see Table 8).

Table 8.

Frequencies for Participants’ Opinion of Their Current Knowledge on Tennessee Gun Legislature

“I am knowledgeable about current Tennessee gun legislature”	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Strongly Agree	7	6.8	6.8
Agree	36	35	35
Neutral	32	31.1	31.1
Disagree	22	21.4	21.4
Strongly Disagree	6	5.8	5.8
Total	103	100	100

Six respondents, 5.8% of the sample size, strongly agreed with the statement “The current gun legislation is appropriate”; seventeen respondents, 16.5% of the sample size, agreed with the statement “The current gun legislation is appropriate”; forty-six respondents, 44.7% of the sample size, neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement “The current gun legislation is appropriate”; twenty-nine respondents, 29% of the sample size, disagreed with the statement “The current gun legislation is appropriate”; five respondents, 4.9% of the sample size, strongly disagreed with the statement “The current gun legislation is appropriate” (see Table 9). By combining “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” the results show that 22.3% of respondents support the current gun legislation. By combining “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree” the results show that 33.1% of respondents do not support the current gun legislation. The largest percentage of students, 44.7% of respondents, neither agree with nor disagree with the appropriateness of the current gun legislation.

Table 9.

Frequencies for Participants’ Opinion of the Current Gun Legislation

“The current gun legislation is appropriate”	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Strongly Agree	6	5.8	5.8
Agree	17	16.5	16.5
Neutral	46	44.7	44.7
Disagree	29	28.2	28.2
Strongly Disagree	5	4.9	4.9
Total	103	100	100

Evaluating the Gun Control Support Scale

The gun control support scale consisted of six items ($\alpha=.70$). The result for Cronbach’s alphas for the gun control support scale was .819. The gun control support scale was found to be highly reliable.

Statistical Analyses and Evaluating the Hypothesis

Correlations

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to examine H5 to test the linear correlation between students’ knowledge of gun legislation and support of gun control (See Table 10). A statistically significant negative correlation was found ($r(103) = -.319, p > .01$, two-tailed). Based on these results, the null hypothesis was rejected; it can be concluded there is a statistically significant relationship between knowledge of Tennessee gun legislature and support of gun control. These variables are negatively correlated. These results are consistent with research performed by Kruis et al. (2019), who found that students in the Mid and Northwestern areas of the United States that had more knowledge of gun legislature and gun crimes were less likely to support gun control.

Table 10.*Correlations*

Hypothesis	r	N	p	Correlation
H5: Students who have more knowledge about gun legislature are less likely to favor gun control.	-.319	103	>.01	Yes, there is a statistically significant relationship between knowledge of Tennessee gun legislature and support of gun control legislature.

Independent Samples *t*-Tests

Independent samples *t*-test were calculated to evaluate whether there was a statistically significant difference between the means in two unrelated groups (see Table 11). When evaluating H1, an independent samples *t*-test was calculated. Criminal justice majors ($M=4.466$, $SD= 5.39$) when compared to other majors ($M= 3.111$, $SD= 4.228$) had no significant differences regarding support for gun control ($t(101) = -2.709$; $p > .01$.; two tailed). Because of this finding, the null hypothesis was retained; there is no statistically significant difference in support for gun control between criminal justice majors and other majors.

Independent samples *t*-test were calculated to evaluate whether there was a statistically significant difference between the means in two unrelated groups (see Table 11). When evaluating H2, an independent samples *t*-test was calculated. Criminal justice majors ($M=5.379$, $SD= 1.089$) when compared to other majors ($M= 4.267$, $SD= 1.286$) had no significant differences in knowledge of Tennessee gun legislature ($t(101)= 4.750$; $p > .01$.; two tailed). Because of this finding, the null hypothesis was retained; there is no statistically significant difference in knowledge of Tennessee gun legislature between criminal justice majors and other majors.

Table 11

Independent sample t-test

Hypothesis	t	N	p	Significance
H1: Criminal justice students are less likely to support gun control laws than other majors	-2.709	101	.021	No, there is not a significant difference in gun control support between criminal justice majors and other majors.
H2: Criminal justice students are more knowledgeable about gun laws than other majors	4.750	101	.129	No, there is not a significant difference in knowledge of Tennessee gun legislature between criminal justice majors and other majors.

Chi-Square

Chi-square test of independence was calculated to evaluate whether two variables are related. When evaluating H3, a chi-square test of independence was conducted. There was a significant relationship between major and completion of a gun safety course, $X^2(1, 103) = 12.542, p=.000$. Because of this finding, the null hypothesis was rejected; it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between gun safety course completion and major.

Chi-square test of independence was calculated to evaluate whether two variables are related. When evaluating H4, a chi-square test of independence was conducted. There was a non-statistically significant relationship between major and handgun permits, $X^2(1, 103) = .602, p=.438$. Because of this finding, the null hypothesis was retained; there was no statistically significant relationship found between major and handgun permits.

Table 12.

Chi-Square

Hypothesis	X ²	N	p	Correlation
H3: Criminal justice students are more likely to have completed a gun safety course than other majors	12.542	103	.000	Yes; there is a statistically significant relationship between gun safety course completion and major.
H4: Criminal justice students are more likely to have a handgun permit than students in other majors	.602	103	.438	No; there is not a statistically significant relationship between handgun permits and major.

Limitations

There are multiple limitations to the study. The sample size (N=103) is large enough for generalization however when compared to East Tennessee State University's population, it is still rather small. East Tennessee State University's undergraduate population is 10,705 for the 2020-2021 academic year (East Tennessee State University Fact Book, 2020). The sampling issues are partly due to only conducting in-person surveys. Many students are still enrolled completely online due to the COVID-19 pandemic and are not taking any in-person classes. This raises another question of the differences between the students who take classes online and students who come to campus. Perhaps the results would be different if the sample included students that are online. Although there are professors teaching classes in-person, due to lack of response, their classes were unable to be surveyed. Additionally, due to time constraints, it was difficult to procedure a larger sample size. These sampling issues should be notes, but they may not account for all of the limitations involved in this study.

Recommendations for Future Research and Potential Policy Implications

Due to this study being conducted on a small scale, other studies should be conducted with a larger population to see if significant results can be produced. As East Tennessee State University is located in the Southern area of the United States, other universities in other geographical locations should be studied to see if similar results are found. Despite this study and existing literature, there is still a gap in research done examining student perceptions of gun legislation.

Regarding policy implications, no actions are recommended as a result of this study. This study found that 44.7% of students neither disagree nor agree with the current gun legislation. However, Criminal Justice Programs need to evaluate if knowledge of Tennessee State gun legislation and federal gun legislature is a topic that needs to be emphasized more in the classroom as criminal justice students are no more knowledgeable than other majors when it comes to this subject. However, these results may not be generalizable to populations outside of East Tennessee State University or even future criminal justice students in this program. The COVID-19 pandemic's effects on students' knowledge and learning abilities is not to be completely dismissed when examining the results of this study. Additional studies should be conducted after students impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic are no longer in the Criminal Justice program to see if this is a result of the COVID-19 pandemic or simply a lack of education.

Conclusion

Due to the current push for gun control in the United States, it is important to continue to study student's perceptions. The current study found that in the overall sample of 103 respondents

from East Tennessee State University that the majority of students, 44.7% of respondents, neither agree nor disagree with the appropriateness of the current gun legislation. Additionally, this study found that there is no relationship between major and knowledge of Tennessee's gun legislation, support of gun control, or hand gun carry permit respectively. However, this study did find a relationship between completion of a firearm safety course and major. Further, this study did find a negative, statistically significant relationship between support for gun control and knowledge of gun legislation. This finding is supported by existing literature (Kruis et al., 2019). Although there are no policy implications as a result of this study, Criminal Justice programs should evaluate their programs to ensure that their students are being educated and retaining their education on current firearm legislation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Survey Instrument

Question	Answer choices
1. What is your gender?	Male Female Other
2. How old are you?	18-20 21+
3. What is your major?	Criminal Justice Other
4. Have you ever had a handgun carry permit?	Yes, I currently have one No, I am under 21 but I will not get one when I am old enough to meet the age requirements No, I am under 21 but will get one when I am old enough to meet the age requirements No, I am 21 or older and do not have a handgun carry permit I am currently in the process of getting my handgun carry permit Other
5. Have you ever taken a gun safety course?	Yes No
6. Do you own a firearm?	Yes No

The next questions are asking how much you agree or disagree with the statements.

7. I am knowledgeable about current Tennessee gun legislature.	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
8. All types of guns should be banned from public use.	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
9. Stricter gun legislation will lower the frequency of future gun-related incidents.	Strongly agree Agree

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| | Neither agree nor disagree |
| | Disagree |
| | Strongly disagree |
| | Strongly agree |
| 10. Gun laws should differentiate between handguns and other guns. | Agree |
| | Neither agree nor disagree |
| | Disagree |
| | Strongly disagree |
| | Strongly agree |
| 11. Mental health screenings should be required to purchase any firearm. | Agree |
| | Neither agree nor disagree |
| | Disagree |
| | Strongly disagree |
| | Strongly agree |
| 12. The Second Amendment should be revised to reflect modern times. | Agree |
| | Neither agree nor disagree |
| | Disagree |
| | Strongly disagree |
| | Strongly agree |
| 13. Second Amendment rights allow more guns to be available to the public than necessary. | Agree |
| | Neither agree nor disagree |
| | Disagree |
| | Strongly disagree |
| | Strongly agree |
| 14. The current gun legislation is appropriate. | Agree |
| | Neither agree nor disagree |
| | Disagree |
| | Strongly disagree |

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. This section of the survey is asking about what your existing knowledge is.

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 15. When purchasing a firearm from a firearms dealer in the state of Tennessee, a background check is required. | True |
| | False |
| 16. When purchasing ammunition from a firearms dealer in the state of Tennessee, a background check is required. | True |
| | False |
| 17. When purchasing a firearm from a firearms dealer in the state of Tennessee, mental health records are reviewed. | True |
| | False |
| 18. It is illegal to own a gun without a valid handgun permit in Tennessee. | True |
| | False |
| 19. Anyone can carry a firearm in their motor vehicle in Tennessee. | True |
| | False |
| 20. In Tennessee, there is no minimum age for owning rifles and shotguns. | True |
| | False |
| 21. It is illegal for a juvenile to own a hand gun in Tennessee. | True |
| | False |

22. It is illegal to own a gun if you have been convicted of a felony. True
False