

UConn Center for Advancing Research, Methods, and Scholarship in Gun Injury Prevention



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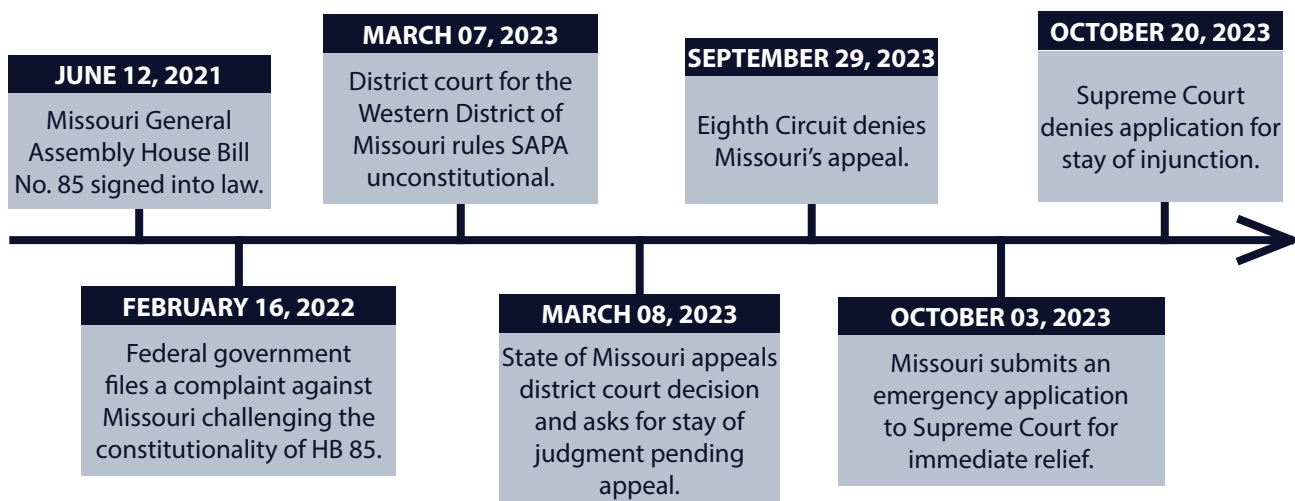
Missouri Citizen Perceptions: Giving Second Amendment Preservation Legislation a Second Look

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PURPOSE

In June 2021, Missouri passed the “Second Amendment Preservation Act” (SAPA), which declares federal regulations restricting gun ownership among state citizens invalid. Though SAPA passed easily and with gubernatorial support, it immediately faced challenges at both the state and federal level, and Missouri citizens’ perceptions of the law and its impact on their safety have been left out of the policy conversation.

FIGURE 1: SECOND AMENDMENT PRESERVATION ACT LEGISLATIVE TIMELINE



To date, the academic literature lacks research investigating the implementation or impact of laws like SAPA on citizens’ perceptions of safety. Using a mix of survey data and qualitative interviews, we aimed to identify the extent to which gun-owning Missouri citizens are aware of SAPA, the extent to which the citizens think SAPA will make their state safer or more dangerous, and the extent to which gun-owning Missouri citizens think SAPA will reduce or increase murders, suicides, gun thefts, and mass shootings.¹ While the study includes only Missourians, it may inform the need to incorporate citizen perception into other state and national gun legislation development to improve policy support and uptake.

BACKGROUND

In Missouri, which has the ninth highest gun death rate in the United States, gun deaths have risen by more than 70% since 2011.² Missouri has responded by reinforcing a policy landscape that minimizes restrictions on gun ownership and expands permissible use (e.g., right-to-carry, stand-your-ground, and castle doctrines).

In this paper, we assess how Missourians feel about SAPA, which prohibits public officials from “[enforcing] any laws, rules, orders, or actions that violate the Second Amendment rights of Missourians.” Given that SAPA and laws like it are intended to facilitate personal defense by allowing citizens greater access to personal firearms to prevent and defend personal attacks, we asked how Missourians perceived SAPA’s effect.

METHODS

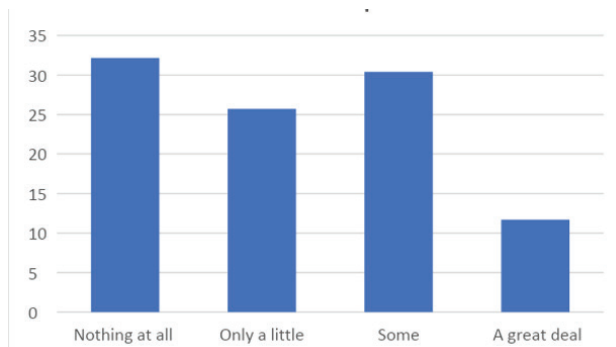
To inform our investigation of citizen stakeholder attitudes regarding the impact of Second Amendment preservation policy on safety and outcomes (e.g., murder, suicide, and mass shootings), we conducted qualitative interviews and surveyed 169 Missourians who lived in a home with a gun.

RESULTS

We asked Missouri respondents six distinct SAPA-related questions to understand the state residents’ knowledge of the law and perceptions of its effect on various public safety measures. Our SAPA-specific questions were preceded by the following policy description: “Last year, Governor Parson signed the ‘Second Amendment Preservation Act’ into law. The Act prohibits state agencies from helping federal officials enforce any laws or rules that the State of Missouri believes violate Second Amendment rights.”

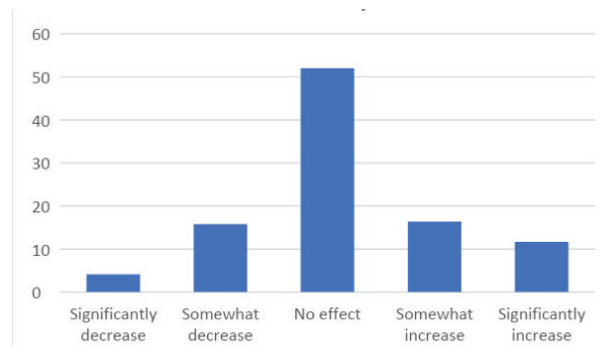
On average, Missourians reported that they had not heard of SAPA [see Figure 2]. Moreover, the most frequent response among Missouri gun owners was that SAPA would not affect overall safety or the gun safety outcomes in our study. However, further exploration of responses indicated a divergence between Missouri gun owners’ perceptions of SAPA’s general impact on safety and how the law will impact specific outcomes. While Missourians lean slightly toward believing SAPA will increase overall safety, they also lean toward believing SAPA will increase gun murders, suicides, and theft [see Figure 3].

FIGURE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS HAVING HEARD OF SAPA



Note: Respondents are from survey of 169 Missouri gun owners. The full survey and analytic detail can be found in the paper “Missouri citizen perceptions: giving Second Amendment preservation legislation a second look” in the *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*.

FIGURE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENT’S BELIEFS ABOUT SAPA’S IMPACT ON MURDER



Note: Respondents are from survey of 169 Missouri gun owners. The full survey and analytic detail can be found in the paper “Missouri citizen perceptions: giving Second Amendment preservation legislation a second look” in the *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*.

As the law relates to mass shootings, Missouri gun owners tend not to believe SAPA will have an impact. Mass shootings, such as those in Sandy Hook, Las Vegas, Parkland, and more recently, Uvalde, each served as a catalyst for policy change that restricts gun access for those who have demonstrated potential to harm themselves or others with a firearm.

Missouri gun owners opposing government regulation of firearms are more likely to believe that SAPA will enhance safety by reducing gun murders, suicides, gun thefts, and mass shootings (see additional figures

on page 4 of this brief). When we interviewed Missourian gun owners, they expressed concern about the appropriate level of government intervention. For example, one respondent said:

“There is a never-ending questionnaire of how heavily the government should be involved in regulating guns. The government takes over, but they have no right to. [Owning a firearm is] guaranteed in the 2nd Amendment.”

Overall, Missouri is distinct from other states in its Second Amendment preservation policies. Missouri gun owners are more likely than their out-of-state peers to identify as their weapon’s primary owner (77% to 56%), Republican (58% to 44%), and White Non-Hispanic (89% to 65%). The differences should be kept in mind when interpreting our results and considering this study’s generalizability to other states or settings.

DISCUSSION

Using Missouri as a case study, our work provides a critical glimpse into how Americans in gun owning households within a permissive firearm policy environment perceive the potential impact of a permissive gun policy law like SAPA on public safety. We find a disconnect between policymaking and citizen engagement. Despite the robust SAPA discussion among policymakers, advocates, and scholars, surveyed residents were largely unaware of the law. Primary gun owners had heard more about SAPA than non-owners living in gun households. (As Missouri’s non-gun owning households were not in our sample, we do not know the extent to which those citizens had heard of SAPA). Yet all citizens—primary gun owners, secondary gun owners, and non-gun owners—should be involved in the policy discussion process. The perceptions of other stakeholders, such as law enforcement, should also be understood to grasp the impacts of SAPA and laws like it.

Perhaps our most surprising finding was that despite state-level policy debates and federal lawsuits, we found little awareness of SAPA among Missouri’s gun owners. Moreover, we found a sense of ambivalence toward the policy’s potential effects. Given the human toll of gun injury and death in Missouri and in the nation more broadly, Missouri may wish to take a second look at SAPA—especially if there is a desire for policy to be both citizen-informed and for citizens to be informed about the policies on which their lives depend.

¹ Raissian, K. M., Dineen, J., Doucette, M., Grasso, D., & Devaney, C. (2023). “Missouri citizen perceptions: giving Second Amendment preservation legislation a second look.” *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, 51 (1), 32 - 52.

² https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/firearm_mortality/firearm.htm.

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ADDITIONAL FIGURES

FIGURE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENT'S BELIEFS ABOUT SAPA'S IMPACT ON SUICIDE

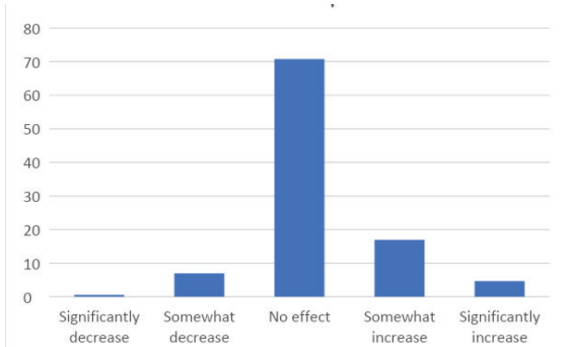


FIGURE 5: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENT'S BELIEFS ABOUT SAPA'S IMPACT ON GUN THEFT

