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Presentation title: The Magnitude and Sources of Disagreement Among Gun Policy Experts

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Without strong scientific evidence of the effects of laws, policymakers and the public rely heavily on what advocates or social scientists believe the effects are most likely to be. This makes gun policy experts' opinions about the likely effects of policies an important influence on gun policy debates and decisions. In this report, we describe the results from two surveys, conducted in 2016 and 2020, in which gun policy experts were asked to evaluate the likely effects of various gun policies on a set of societally important outcomes. Combining across both surveys, we obtained information from 173 unique participants on the hypothesized effects for 19 policies and 10 outcomes. We use these responses to: (1) establish both the diversity of beliefs among gun policy experts about the effects of gun laws, and describe where experts are in agreement on those effects, and (2) evaluate whether differences in the policies favored by experts result from disagreements about the policies' true effects or disagreements in experts' policy objectives or values. We find two classes of experts who are sharply differentiated on how favorably they view policies (i.e., whether they favor permissive or restrictive gun policies). We show that differences in these groups' policy favorability ratings are almost exclusively explained by differences in their assessments of what the true effects of the policies will be, suggesting that further scientific evidence may be useful in resolving some disagreements among policy experts about the merits of different gun policies. Furthermore, we identified five policies for which the two expert classes exhibited substantially less disagreement. These policies may be ones where compromise might be found among different stakeholders in gun policy debates.