“He wouldn’t have hurt that many students with a knife”

The Gun Control Paradox, Political Opportunities and Issue Framing: A case study of the Never Again movement in Parkland, Florida

By Rosalind Göthberg
# Table of Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose and Research Question</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposition</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous Research</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative Responses After School Shootings</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gun Control Participation Paradox</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framing the Gun Control Issue</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theory</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Opportunity Structures</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framing</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical Framework</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Design</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysis</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Access to the Debate for New Actors</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instability Within the Political Elite</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influential Allies</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful Framing</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion and the Gun Control Participation Paradox</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sources</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Introduction**

Even though many studies and polls show that most people in the US want stricter gun laws, legislation to that end has been absent. Despite high levels of gun violence and deadly mass shootings, American gun control legislation remain far less restrictive than other Western nations. This fact, known as the *gun control paradox*, is something that has been puzzling to scholars for a long time. Kristin Goss has developed this paradox into what she calls the *gun control participation paradox*, asking the question: “Why do Americans who want strict gun control not mobilize in large numbers, in a sustained way to get it?”.

However, during the last few months, the gun control movement in the US seems to have been revitalized by the Never Again movement, formed by surviving students from the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14th, 2018. Only a few days after the tragic event where seventeen people were killed, the students started appearing in national and international media, advocating for gun control and stricter gun laws. In just a few weeks, they managed to face politicians and representatives from the NRA (National Rifle Association) in a town hall meeting hosted and broadcasted by CNN and gathered hundreds of thousands for the anti-gun protest March for Our Lives with events all around the world, the main one in Washington. A few weeks after the shooting, a new, stricter gun law was passed in Florida that raised the minimum age for purchasing a gun from 18 to 21, created a three day waiting period for prospective gun buyers and banned so-called bump stocks, a device that enables rifles to fire faster. The New York Times called this legislation “a major victory for the new activists of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School” and said this bill, if signed, would be the “first successful gun control measure in Florida in more than 20 years”.

During this time, it does thereby seem to have been some sort of shift in the US gun control debate.

In this study, I will attempt to find the reasons for that shift and examine some of the factors that might have contributed to the hitherto success of the student activists from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, who call themselves the Never Again movement. To do that, I will look closer at how the movement has been working to advocate the issue of gun control and the

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context it has been doing this within. I will analyze this through a framework based on social movement theories about political opportunity structures and issue framing, as well as previous research on gun control movements in the United States.

**Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the Never Again movement in the US gun control debate, searching for factors that can explain the impact the movement has been able to make in such a short amount of time. The motivation for choosing this topic comes from both within and outside the academic field. It is an interesting case to study in relation to the gun control (participation) paradox since these activists are attempting to “mobilize in large numbers, in a sustained way” and also as a case of a modern day social movement lead by young people. Apart from that, gun violence is an issue of great public concern and since this particular movement has been so visible in the news all over the world lately, their involvement in this debate is certainly worth looking more closely at. I will not attempt to say anything about future outcomes of the movement but focus on what they have accomplished so far and how they have been able to do so. The study has a mainly descriptive approach, with some explanatory ambitions, guided by the following research question:

*How can the Never Again movements emergence and impact be explained through theories of political opportunity structures and issue framing?*

**Disposition**

In the next section, I will present the previous research that will serve as a departure point for this study. The research is about the gun debate and gun legislation in the US, more specifically the aftermath of school shootings, the gun control paradox and framing of the gun control issue. After that, I will move on to theory and describe political opportunity structures and issue framing. These two will then be combined into an analytical framework consisting of four factors that I will use to analyze the Never Again movements emergence and success - increased access to the political debate for new actors, instability within the political elite, influential allies and successful framing. I will also present my research design and method, a case study focusing on the movement during the two months after the school shooting (February 14 to April 14,
Rosalind Göthberg
Department of Government
Uppsala University

2018) that will be conducted through a qualitative text analysis. Last, before starting the analysis I will present the material which primarily consists of news coverage, social media posts, speeches and debates from these two months.

In the analysis, I will go through each of the four factors and examine whether they seem to have been present in this context. I argue that at least to a certain extent, they all have been and I will discuss how they relate to each other and to Kristin Goss’ explanations for the gun control participation paradox. Last, I draw the conclusion that even though we cannot know if the movement will be able to turn into something sustained that will affect gun legislation on a national level, it has through a combination of favorable political opportunity structures and successful issue framing achieved a few crucial things that previous gun control movements have been missing.

**Previous Research**

Since there is a lot of research around school shootings and the gun control debate in the US, I have narrowed my focus down to what I find most relevant for my study: the aftermath of school shootings, the gun control paradox and previous studies of the framing of gun control issues.

**Legislative Responses After School Shootings**

Starting with research focused on the aftermath of school shootings and responses in form of policy or legislative changes, Gereluk, Donlevy and Thomson say that legislative changes after the Sandy Hook shooting in 2012 were done which resulted in both more and less restrictive gun laws. They argue that the dominant response to gun violence has been to demand increased security without properly evaluating the effectiveness of the security measures or taking the underlying, implicit signals those measures will send into consideration. Lockdown procedures could, for example, send the message that schools are inherently unsafe places. The ambiguity of these responses is also showed in Schildkraut and Hernandez examination of legislative responses after school shootings. They indicate that even though there have been legislative responses in some cases, a lot of the bills introduced in the aftermath of a school shooting

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concerning things like background checks or private dealing of weapons are never passed.\textsuperscript{4} Related to this, Lawrence and Birkland examine the relationship between media and Congress in this kind of cases. They conclude that there is a sort of positive feedback loop between media and Congress regarding which issues to focus on but that there also is a difference between the media discourse and the legislative content. Congress tends to favor pre-existing problem definitions with pre-existing solutions while media wants to find new, spectacular definitions of a problem. In their article, they also bring up the problem the gun control issue is facing in having to compete with other political issues for media attention and that this is not just a competition between issues but also between different aspects of those issues.\textsuperscript{5} This means that we have to be careful when examining and expecting legislative responses to school shootings and remember that the media discourse might differ from how the issue is presented in suggested policy changes. These studies highlight some of the challenges that gun control movements in the US, and more specifically the Never Again movement as a gun control movement born after a school shooting, are up against. Apart from that, they also point to the importance of issue framing, which I will return to later.

The Gun Control Participation Paradox

The issue of the missing gun control movement and the gun control paradox are thoroughly examined in Kirsten Goss book \textit{Disarmed: The Missing Movement for Gun Control in America}.\textsuperscript{6} There, she goes through the history of the advocacy for gun control, explaining why it has not been that successful in comparison to their opponents (most notably the NRA) or to movements like those for prohibition, civil- and women’s rights. Contrary to previous scholars who have examined the gun control paradox, Goss does not settle for an explanation centering around the fact that the gun rights side is more powerful, intense and well organized but argues that to fully understand the paradox, we must also look closer at the weaknesses of the gun control movement. Her focus lies on the issues of participation and she concludes that previous gun control movements have failed in three important ways. First, it has not been able to secure strong patronage from the government, voluntary organizations or influential individuals.

\textsuperscript{5} Regina G Lawrence and Thomas A Birkland, “Guns, Hollywood and School Safety: Defining the School-Shooting Problem Across Public Arenas”, \textit{Social Science Quarterly}, vol. 85/no.5, 2004
\textsuperscript{6} Goss, \textit{Disarmed: The Missing Movement for Gun Control in America}
Second, for a long time, the gun control side has been struggling with crafting a resonant, culturally appealing issue frame and the debate has therefore been controlled by the gun rights advocates. Third, it has failed in using strategies that could deliver victories important for movement-building by focusing on large, national issues instead of incremental policy change. Goss’ view on the gun control paradox as an issue of participation and her theories on where the gun control movements weaknesses lies (trouble with securing strong patronage, crafting resonant issue frames and delivering movement-building victories) can help us understand why it has not yet been able to fulfill its goals, securing stricter gun control laws. Because of this, they would also be interesting to apply to the case of the Never Again movement and I will therefore include this view, especially Goss’ theories on why the gun control movement has failed so far, in my analysis.

Framing the Gun Control Issue

The importance of issue framing (how a particular political issue is being presented to the public) in the gun control debate is a widely researched topic. First of all, looking at the effects of different kinds of framing, Stephen Wu shows in a survey experiment that youth attitudes towards gun control and gun rights are affected by the ordering, framing and wording of the questions being asked but that these effects also depend on the person's political identification and pre-existing political preference. The results of the study show that Republicans were most likely to be affected by different cues and frames. Wu also concludes that “emotional cues strengthen pre-existing biases towards gun control and gun rights, while informational cues sway people to become more moderate in their views on these issues”. In a similar way, Haider-Markel and Joslyn show in an earlier study that framing affects both opinions about gun-related policy and blame attribution after shooting tragedies. Among their findings are that the support for concealed handguns is low when the issue is presented as a threat to public safety but high when presented as an individual right. Just like Wu, they also show that different frames will have different effects depending on pre-existing party affiliation. When looking at frames for blame attribution Democrats seem to be more responsive to “blame gun law” frames while

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7 Goss, Disarmed: The Missing Movement for Gun Control in America
8 Stephen Wu, “The Effects of Cueing and Framing on Youth Attitudes Towards Gun Control and Gun Rights”, Social Sciences, vol. 7/no. 2, 2018
Republicans respond more to frames about blaming media violence. They also, like Wu, claim that Republicans (as well as independents and people with low knowledge on the issue) are more sensitive to alternative issue frames. These studies show that framing is a crucial factor when analyzing the gun control debate and people's attitudes towards gun control. The fact that framing seems to have the most effect on people identifying as Republicans is another important point since they tend to be more in favor of the gun rights side than the Democrats, as for example is shown in a study by Joslyn et al, which concludes that gun owners are more likely than non-gun owners to vote Republican. The right kind of framing should therefore be able to lead to a change of opinions on the Republican side, which in turn would be an important step towards changing gun legislation.

On the matter of how the issue of gun control has been framed in the media after school shootings as well as how these frames change over time to keep maintain issue salience, Chyi and McCombs have developed a theoretical framework for analyzing media coverage, looking at spatial dimensions (if the issue is framed as an individual, community, regional, societal or international problem) and time dimensions (if the issue is framed as relevant for the past, present or future). They use this framework to look at the media coverage after the mass shooting at Columbine High School in 1999, concluding that even though the individual frame was common in the beginning it decreased over time making the societal frame the most prominent. When looking at the time aspect the present frame was the most common overall, at first together with the past frame which decreased over time while the future frame increased. Muschert and Carr use the same framework in their analysis of nine different school shootings between 1997 and 2001 with similar results, that the spatial frames in time shifts from the individual or community to societal levels and the time frames are mostly present with an increase of future frames towards the end. Thus, in the aftermath of a school shooting the problem of gun violence has often initially been framed as something present on individual and community level and then shifted towards being seen as a societal problem that also will affect the future. Even

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12 Hsiang Iris Chyi and Maxwell McCombs, “Media Salience and the Process of Framing: Coverage of the Columbine School Shootings”, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 81/no. 1, 2004
though the studies connect the frame-changing processes of the events to its salience in the media they do not fully explain the effects these different frames might have on the public. However, since the framing affects how the problem is presented, it is likely that it will also affect what kind of actions people are willing to take. It would therefore be of interest to look at if the Never Again movement has been talking about gun control as a past, present or future problem that mostly operates on an individual, regional, community or societal level.

Regarding different framing strategies in the public debate around gun rights and gun control, Steidley and Colen have conducted a comparison of press releases from the NRA (against stricter gun control) and the Brady Campaign (pro-gun control). They show that the NRA talk about gun rights as a matter of Second Amendment rights and freedom; American heritage and culture; as well as safety and the rule of law. The Brady Campaign, on the other hand, used frames concerning rights and democracy; public health and safety; and crime control when advocating gun control, where the first two (rights and democracy, public health and safety) have been most effective in gaining media coverage. The article also shows that the effect of press releases will be affected by media biases (usually favoring the gun control side) but also that this type of direct contact with the media is easier for older, larger and more organized movements (usually favoring the NRA).

Another framing strategy examined by Craig Rood is Obama's rhetorical responses to the Sandy Hook shooting in 2012 (where 20 children and 6 adults were killed at an elementary school). He used what Rood calls a “warrant of the dead”-rhetoric, a sort of ethical claim that we have a responsibility to those who died. The idea behind this is that it will help to solve the problem of peoples fleeting engagement with the issue by invoking the wider context of gun violence and talking about the dead as our own, in this case our children, instead of as statistics. The problem with this was however, according to Rood, that it opened up for accusations from opponents of violating decorum and manipulating emotions and that it is hard to sustain a movement based on ideas of responsibility and obligation.

15 Ibid
16 Craig Rood, ”Our Tears are Not enough”: The Warrant of the Dead in the Rhetoric of Gun Control’, Quarterly Journal of Speech, vol. 104/no. 1, 2018
17 Ibid
To frame gun control as an issue of protecting the children could otherwise be an efficient way to increase public engagement, as argued by Goss. According to her findings, this kind of framing, when introduced in the 90’s, helped personalize and broaden the debate. Until then the gun control side had mainly been framing gun violence as a problem concerning crime control which limited the issue to a certain group and context and turned it into an “expert” issue, focusing a lot on the technical aspects that were hard for the public to get involved with. The crime control frame was, in fact, favorable to the gun rights side who could meet it with arguments like, “if guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns” and claim that more restrictive gun control laws would make law abiding citizens more vulnerable but not have any real effect on crimes. Another reason that the crime control frame did not work in the gun control advocates favor was that ordinary people had a hard time identifying with it, not believing they would ever be victims of a crime. Framing the issue as one of child-protection however made it more broadly resonant since child protection is seen as a legitimate state function and because children enjoy sentimental affection, both on a personal level given the fact that many politically active adults are parents and as symbols of the nation’s future.

To summarize the different framing strategies found in the previous research: Advocates for gun control seem to have been most successful when framing the gun control issue in terms of public health, safety and child-protection, frames that appeal to a broad public and are emotionally resonant. This can however also open up to critique from opponents concerning manipulation of emotions in the response to a tragic event, like in the case of Obama's “warrant of the dead”-rhetoric. The gun rights side has instead been able to dominate the debate when the issue has been framed as one of crime control and they have to a larger extent been using frames appealing to American culture, presenting gun ownership as something inherently American and a constitutional, Second Amendment right.

**Summary**

The previous research does thereby show that legislative responses after school shootings have been ambiguous, that the gun control advocates in the US have been struggling with creating a

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18 Goss, *Disarmed: The Missing Movement of Gun Control in America*

19 Ibid
sustained movement and that how the issue of gun control is framed matters for the public opinion. What seems to be missing however is closer research on recent gun control organizations from a social movement perspective, connecting the gun control paradox to social movement theories. This is what I will be focusing on in my study of the Never Again movement, while also taking the matter of issue framing into consideration.

**Theory**

To answer the question of how the Never Again movements emergence and impact could be explained, I have created an analytical framework based on social movement theories. These revolve around *political opportunity structures*, the factors within a society and political system that can be favorable for social movements and *issue framing*, how movements define the issues they advocate for as well as its causes, effects and possible solutions. In this section, I will explain these two theoretical approaches in greater detail and describe how I will combine them in my study.

In the book *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Sidney Tarrow describes social movements as “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained action with elites, opponents and authorities”. Despite the fact that the Parkland students call themselves a movement, it would be more correct to define them as a *social movement organization* that is a part of the larger US gun control movement. The same theories are however still applicable and for practical reasons I will continue to refer to them as the Never Again movement in this thesis.

**Political Opportunity Structures**

Tarrow defines *political opportunities* as “consistent - but not necessarily formal or permanent - dimensions of the political environment or of change in that environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting expectations for success or failure”. Favorable opportunities therefore increase the possibility that people will mobilize around a common cause and that a

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21 Ibid, p 123-124
22 Ibid, p 163
social movement will emerge. Opportunities like these are never something objective but must be perceived and used by “movement entrepreneurs” to have an effect. Also, as David Mayer writes in his article *Protest and Political Opportunities*, the impact a certain factor will have on a movement varies depending on the context. This means that when analyzing a social movement one has to choose which aspects to include in the analysis based on what seems to be important in that particular case. A decline in repression from the state can for example be an important factor when explaining the contention leading up to the fall of the Soviet Union but not as much when, like in this case, trying to explain a modern day movement in the US fighting for a specific cause and aiming to change a specific piece of legislation. Given this, I have chosen to focus on the factors brought forward by Tarrow as especially important for opening up the perceived prospect of success for a social movement, as they all seem to or at least could be relevant for the case I’m studying. These factors are *opening of access to participation for new actors, evidence of political realignment within the polity, availability of influential allies and emerging splits within the elite*. What they mean and how I will use them in my study will be explained further in the analytical framework section.

**Framing**

The process of *issue framing* has been proven to be an important aspect of social movements in general as well as the American gun control debate in particular. Robert Entman defines framing as “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommended for the item described”. According to him, frames are not only used to define problems, diagnose causes and suggest remedies but also to make moral judgments. A successful frame will therefore have a large impact on how a problem is perceived by the target audience or, as Entman says: “the frames determines whether most people notice and how they understand a problem, as well as how they evaluate and choose to act upon it”. Benford and Snow also highlight the importance of framing by arguing that it is a

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23 Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, p 163
24 Davis S Mayer, “Protest and Political Opportunities”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 30/no. 1, 2004
25 Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, p 164-165
26 Robert M Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm”, *Journal of Communication*, vol. 43/no. 4, 1993, p 52
27 Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm”, p 54
“central dynamic in understanding the character and cause of social movements”, alongside political opportunity structures. They identify three core framing tasks, similar to those pointed out by Entman, which they call: diagnostic framing (defining the problem and focusing blame or responsibility), prognostic framing (articulating a solution to the problem) and motivational framing (providing a rationale to engage in collective action).²⁸ I will use these different aspects of issue framing as a basis when looking at how the advocates for the Never Again movement have been framing the issue of gun control in the debate and whether they seem to have succeeded with all of these tasks.

Analytical Framework

The two presented theoretical approaches, political opportunity structures and issue framing, are often considered alongside each other in the research on social movements. In my study however, I will combine the two into the same framework. This is because I argue that how a movement frames an issue will affect which opportunities they can take advantage of, for example their access to political participation or which allies the movement could gain support from. The framework consists of four factors that will be used to describe the emergence and success of the Never Again movement. I will now present these four and explain how they are relevant to my study.

1) Increased access to political participation for new actors

Tarrow writes that an increased access for people who for some reason have not been politically engaged in a certain issue before enhances the possibility and incentives for contention since these people, even though they have gained opportunities, might still not be able to pursue their cause through institutional channels.²⁹ One way that new actors can gain access to the political debate is through other movements paving the way, during what Tarrow calls a cycle of contention, a “phase of heightened conflict across the system, with a rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors”. Through these cycles, actors can inspire each other and open up opportunities for new movements.³⁰ In this case, it is therefore relevant to

²⁸ Robert D Benford and David A Snow, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment', Annual Review of Sociology, vol. 26/no. 1, 2000
²⁹ Tarrow, Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics, p 164-166
³⁰ Ibid, p 199
look at if the students, as survivors of a school shooting could be called new actors in the debate as well as if and how their access to political participation has increased. I will also examine if there are other movements that could have helped the Never Again movement gain momentum and through that expanded their access to the political debate.

2) Instability within the political elite

Electoral instability, new coalitions and changing dynamics between the government and opposition party creates an uncertainty that challengers can take advantage of. Movements can also be encouraged by conflicts and divisions within the elites because it both provides incentives to take the risk of protesting and the possibility of support from parts of the elite. Another reason for why the dynamic between the movement and the political elite is important in this case is that movement-building victories in the form of legislative change are something Goss’ says that previous gun control movements have been struggling with. Since the Republican party traditionally has been advocates for gun rights and opposed stricter gun control regulations, rifts and divides within that part of the US political elite can therefore have affected the political opportunities for gun control movements.

3) Presence of influential allies

Influential allies can help movements by acting as guarantors against repression or as acceptable negotiators. Allies within the polity can for example be crucial when it comes to policy response since they act as mediators between movement and power holders. For the gun control movement, it has been hard to secure allies that could help give the cause moral authority and provide resources in the form of money and volunteers. Politicians and established organizations already working for gun control in the US could in this case be an example of potential allies but I will also look at those who have helped spread the movement’s message, for example on social media, and provided the movement with different resources.

31 Tarrow, Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics, p 199
32 Ibid
33 Ibid, p 218
34 Goss, Disarmed: The Missing Movement for Gun Control in America, p 193
4) Successful framing

As previously shown, how the issue of gun control is framed does affect the success of gun control advocates in the public debate and according to Goss they have often failed to create resonant, culturally appealing issue frames. Therefore, I will also examine how the Never Again movement has framed this issue in speeches, social media posts and debates, and analyze this in relation to previous research.

This framework will be applied to the case of the Never Again movement, how they have been working and in which political and societal context. Before that, I will present the design of the study, its method and the material I have been using to answer my research question.

Research Design

This study is a theory-consuming case study, meaning that the case of the Never Again movement is the center of the study and I will use existing theories trying to explain the events of this particular case. As Esaiasson et al. point out, the differences between a theory-consuming and theory-testing study are not as big as they sometimes appear since the results of a study like this to some degree will affect our faith in the theory. The design methods do however differ in how the studies are motivated, theory-testing studies centers around the theory and the cases are used to test that theory while, as mentioned, theory-consuming studies are primarily focused on the case.35 Another difference between the two types of studies, according to these authors, is the need to generalize the results. Since the goal of a theory-consuming study is to test if a certain factor or explanatory model can be used to explain the case of which the study centres around it is not as important to be able to transfer the result of this study to other cases.36 However, because the study is based on both previous research and established theories, I still argue that the result will be at least analytically generalizable and relevant for the American gun control debate in general, not just this particular case.

36 Ibid, p 89
Method

My primary method is what Esaiasson et al. call a *qualitative text analysis*, a method suitable when the focus lies both with the text itself, the context in which it has been produced and the meaning behind a certain phenomenon. To conduct such an analysis one has to concretize the formulated problem and create precise questions to use on the material.\(^{37}\) The foundation of this study will be the framework presented above and the factors will initially be examined separately. To be able to do this, they have to be operationalized through the kind of questions Esaiasson et al. writes about and I have therefore created a few such questions for each factor:

1) **Increased access to participation for new actors**
   a) Can the students be seen as new actors in the debate?
   b) Has their access to participation increased? How?
   c) Can their access have been expanded by other movements?

2) **Instability within the political elite**
   a) Are there divides in the political system that could have affected the movements opportunities?
   b) Has the Never Again movement gained support or success as a result of the division?

3) **Influential allies**
   a) Does the Never Again movement have influential allies?
   b) In what ways have those allies been supporting the Never Again movement?

4) **Successful framing**
   a) How have the advocates of the Never Again movement been framing the issue of gun control?
      i) How do they diagnose the problem?
      ii) What kind of solutions are they suggesting?
      iii) How do they motivate people to get involved with the gun control issue?
      iv) What spatial and time frames are they using?
   b) How does this framing relate to successful/unsuccesful framings of the gun control issue in the past?

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Material

The material used in this study have mainly been news reporting and material directly from the relevant actors (the movement, their allies and their opponents) such as posts from their own social media accounts, press releases, interviews, debates and speeches. This means that there is a certain bias in all the material which demands a large amount of source criticism and I have throughout the process of writing this thesis been aware of the fact that it can be seen as problematic to rely too much on sources like these. Since this is such a recent case and I have not had the access or resources to for example conduct interviews with actors in or around the movement, they are however the sources that have been available to me. To get around some of these issues, I have attempted to triangulate my findings, comparing reporting from different news outlets, primary material from the actors and previous research.

When it comes to the news reporting, I have chosen media outlets that have a large circulation or reach within the US and with have a certain focus on politics, ending up with USA Today, The Washington Post and CNN. While these, of course, can be claimed to have a political agenda of their own (they are often said to be liberal or left-leaning), they are still representative for how the debate and the Never Again movement have been presented in US media. However, because of the possible bias, I have also looked at reporting from the conservative channel Fox News. In all of the cases, I have made my selection of material through searching the news sources websites by using keywords like “Never Again”, “Parkland” and “March For Our Lives” and thereafter chosen the articles or video clips relevant for the factors I am examining.

For the material produced and spread by the actors themselves through social media, I have chosen to use the most widespread and official accounts since they have the largest audiences and are most likely to be representative for the actor’s views. The movement has two official Twitter accounts founded in February 2018: NeverAgain (which now has changed its name to rate4ourlives) and AMarch4OurLives. The largest Twitter accounts associated with the movement are however those belonging to individual spokespersons and I have therefore included two of these, David Hogg and Emma González. I have also examined Twitter
accounts, websites and press releases from allies of the movement such as politicians and social media profiles.

When analyzing the issue framing, I have been looking at video material from three different occasions. First, the speech that Emma González held at an anti-gun rally a few days after the shooting. Second, the town hall meeting on February 22, hosted and broadcasted by CNN where the students faced politicians and representatives of the NRA. Last but not least, the speeches some of the most visibly active students held at the March For Our Lives on March 24.

With regards to time, I have limited myself to material produced within two months after the shooting, that is February 14th to April 14th, 2018. In some cases, I have used material produced before the shooting for background context.

**Analysis**

In this analysis, I will go through the factors separately and for each present the results I got from applying the analytical questions on my material. I will then discuss how I believe these are related to each other and to the previous research on the gun control paradox and issue framing.

**Increased Access to Participation for New Actors**

That high school students who have survived a school shooting of this magnitude take such a prominent role in the American gun control debate is, at least according to the recent media coverage, a new phenomenon. *USA Today* claimed that the students have “broken through a decades-long stalemate in the gun-control debate in ways that no other group of survivors has been able to”.38 The fact that they are victims themselves, as survivors of the shooting, seems to be one of the crucial aspects. The article makes a comparison to the Sandy Hook shooting where the victims were 6 and 7-year-old children who in the aftermath were shielded from the media which made it harder for the public to form a direct connection to them. The Parkland students, on the other hand, started sharing their personal experiences in media right after the event.39

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38 Alan Gomez, “The Parkland survivors started a movement when they took on gun violence. Here’s how it happened”, *USA Today*, February 22, 2018

39 Ibid
Associate professor Erica Marat also writes in a news article that something that makes the debate after this mass shooting stand out from previous ones is that the victims themselves are both identifiable, visible and gaining public sympathy.\textsuperscript{40} This means that these students not only are new as prominent actors in this debate but also that their role as survivors seems to have had an effect on the movement.

Another unique aspect of this group articulated by both themselves and media is that they are from the generation raised after the shooting at Columbine High School in 1999. In an interview with \textit{60 minutes}, they called themselves the “mass shooting generation”, saying that “We are the generation that have had to be trapped in closets waiting for a shooter to walk into our door. We are the people that know what it’s like first hand”.\textsuperscript{41} For this generation, mass shootings have been something recurring that they have grown up preparing for “the way those who are older grew up with fire drills”\textsuperscript{42}, which makes them see and understand these events in a new way. The fact that these students are born after the Columbine shooting but still are old enough to speak for themselves is according \textit{Washington Post} one of the reasons for why they are mobilizing and participating in the debate to this extent: “This is the first premeditated mass shooting at this scale that involved people who both grew up entirely in a world in which mass shootings were common and which targeted people old enough to have a voice”.\textsuperscript{43}

Turning to the issue of increased access, it has been pointed out that this movement is operating in a political climate which Tarrow probably would call a \textit{cycle of contention}. The Never Again movement rose in a context where there were a lot of “movement role models” to take inspiration from, for example #MeToo, the hashtag under which many women started sharing their experiences about sexual abuse on Twitter and other social media platforms in October 2017. It shares some important characteristics with the Never Again movement, like the use of social media for mobilization and communication. According to \textit{USA Today}, #MeToo “helped create an environment in which #NeverAgain could flourish”.\textsuperscript{44} The March For Our Lives, which

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{40}] Erica Marat, “You need two things for a successful anti-violence movement. Post-Parkland activism about guns has both”, \textit{Washington Post}, February 23, 2018
\item[\textsuperscript{41}] 60 minutes, “\textit{We’re the mass shooting generation}” [video], Youtube, March 18, 2018
\item[\textsuperscript{42}] Philip Bump, “Why Parkland students have emerged as a powerful political voice”, \textit{Washington Post}, February 19, 2018
\item[\textsuperscript{43}] Ibid
\item[\textsuperscript{44}] Rick Hampson, “Gun control momentum ‘didn’t happen out of the blue’: Why Parkland’s different”, \textit{USA Today}, March 7, 2018
\end{itemize}
the students almost immediately started planning for has also been compared to other recent protest marches like the Women’s March, organized as a reaction to Donald Trump’s victory in the 2016 presidential elections. With Tarrows words, one could therefore say that these previous movements have expanded opportunities for others which the Never Again movement has benefited from through new ways of gaining access to the political debate.

A more concrete way through which these new actors have gained increased access is of course the present technological opportunities. A clear difference between the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and the survivors of the Columbine shooting in 1999 is that the later did not have access to social media and similar quick ways of getting their message out there and communicating to the public. Tarrow also acknowledges the importance of internet as a tool for social movements, saying that it “has opened up new windows of opportunity to movement groups with the strategic vision and the tactical skills to use it effectively”. As mentioned above, social media is where the students started to mobilize with the Never Again hashtag and primarily Twitter has throughout the process remained one of the movements main ways of communicating in between the protests and television appearances.

Through the movements official Twitter accounts, rate4ourlives and AMarch4OurLives, the students have been encouraging people to participate in protest actions, promoting events like the March For Our Lives, sharing articles and videos about the movement and the gun control issue and in other ways communicated directly with their supporters. The personal accounts belonging to David Hogg and Emma Gonzaléz are promoting the same kind of messages as the other but with a more personal and emotional tone. They have posted more elaborate political messages and suggestions as well as more direct political attacks directed at for example NRA and president Trump. Together, these accounts seem to capture everything the movement is trying to convey, their political messages and encouragement to mobilize which shows how important they have been for the movements emergence.

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45 AJ Willingham, “Slacktivism is over. The #NeverAgain movement is about what’s next”, CNN, March 26, 2018
46 Gomez, “The Parkland Students started a movement when they took on gun violence. Here’s how it happened”
47 Tarrow, Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics, p 138
48 @rate4ourlives, Twitter; @AMarch4OurLives, Twitter
49 @davidhogg111, Twitter; @Emma4Change, Twitter
Thus, this post-Columbine generation of technical skilled high school students who have been directly affected by one of the largest school shootings in US history has emerged as new actors in the gun control debate. Their access to this debate seems to have been increased through other recent movements who have been using similar methods and through the development of social media as a tool for mobilization and communication around political issues.

Instability Within the Political Elite

In January, less than a month before the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, the US government shut down for three days after the Senate failed to agree on a spending bill. In February, it entered another brief shutdown before finally agreeing on a budget deal. According to *Washington Post*, this illuminated the dynamics of the current American politics where the Republican party is struggling with internal divisions and its relationship to the president while the Democrats are driven further to the left as a result of the resistance towards Donald Trump. *Fox News* reported that the spending disagreements within the Republican party have continued, especially in regards to the Mexican border wall. Even though gun control has not been the issue in these conflicts, they could still have contributed to the kind of unstable, political environment with divisions both between and within the parties that Tarrow claims can be favorable to social movements.

The Parkland students themselves have clearly stated that they do not consider the issue of gun control to belong to a certain party, for example through a widely spread tweet from David Hogg stating: “Can we please not debate this as Democrats and Republicans but discuss this as Americans?”. Even so, since the Republican party traditionally has been the ones who oppose stricter gun control regulations, their response to the Parkland shooting and following debate would be the most interesting to look closer at and there seems to have been at least a partial

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50 Robert Costa et al, “House votes to end government shutdown, sending legislation to Trump”, *Washington Post*, January 22, 2018
51 Nicole Gaudiano and Deirdre Shesgreen, “Government shutdown ends with Trump signature on spending bill”, *USA Today*, February 9, 2018
52 Dan Balz, “Shutdown dynamics highlight the state of politics on Trump’s anniversary”, *Washington Post*, January 20, 2018
53 Adam Shaw, “Funding for border wall in spending bill divides conservatives and establishment Republicans”, *FOX News*, March 22, 2018
54 @davidhogg111, *Can we please not debate this as Democrats and Republicans but discuss this as Americans?* Twitter, March 11, 2018
shift. The new Florida gun bill, which included measures like imposing a three-day waiting period and raising the minimum age to 21 for purchasing long guns as well as banning bump stocks, was signed by the Republican governor Rick Scott. The bill has not only been described as a major shift regarding gun laws in Florida but also for Scott himself who previously have been defending gun rights and allying himself with the NRA. In April, another former NRA supporting Republican governor, Phil Scott in Vermont, signed a similar bill despite protests from gun control opponents and the NRA. Both of these laws have been described as more restrictive than either of the states have ever had before.

Of course, there are still Republicans who are opposed to this kind of measures. Republican senator Ted Cruz quickly criticised Democrats for “politicizing the issue” after the shooting. He claimed that gun control is not the answer but that focus instead should lie on criminals and mental illnesses. There have also been more direct attacks on the Never Again movement and its spokespersons from Republican politicians, like Republican house candidate Leslie Gibson who publicly called Emma González a “skinhead lesbian” and David Hogg a “bald faced liar”. These comments eventually caused Gibson to drop his candidacy.

Without arguing that there has been a causal process, the instability within the political elite that Tarrow talks about has been present in the US during the birth of the Never Again movement. They have gained partial support from Republican politicians who earlier have been on the gun rights side of the debate, resulting in legislative changes criticized by other Republicans and the NRA.

**Influential Allies**

The gun debate in the US has been engaging people for a long time, not least within the polity. Someone who has been advocating for stricter gun control laws is the previous president, Barack

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56 Megan Flynn, “How Vermont’s NRA A-rated governor was ‘shocked’ into backing new gun law”, *Washington Post*, April 12, 2018
57 FOX News Insider, “Cruz: ‘Dems’ Reaction to any Tragedy is to Politicize, ‘Push Gun Control’”, *FOX News*, February 15 2018
Obama. In January 2016 he went passed Congress and issued a number of executive actions with the aim of reducing gun violence, for example strengthening the background check system and enforcing stricter regulations for gun sellers. For this, he received critique from Republicans and some of these measures were later reversed when Donald Trump came into office. Even though Barack Obama does not have any formal political powers today, he should still be seen as an influential person in the debate who reaches out to a wide range of people. Obama has publicly supported the Never Again movement on multiple occasions. In a letter to the students that was sent and published a few days before March For Our Lives, he and his wife wrote that the students have “helped awaken the conscience of the nation” and that “we will be there for you”. On Twitter he also called for stricter gun laws directly after the shooting and expressed support for the movement on the day for March For Our Lives, reaching out to 102 million followers.

Another political ally when it comes to the issue of stricter gun control is the Democratic Senator Chris Murphy, who in 2016 staged an almost 15-hour filibuster (a long debate or speech) in the US Senate to push for a vote on stricter gun control legislation. Murphy also spoke in the Senate directly after the shooting, calling it a “consequence of our inaction” and claiming that it is the Congress responsibility to end “the epidemic of mass slaughter”. With regards to the March For Our Lives, he issued a statement of support on his website, saying that “it’s going to be advocates like you who lead the way. I’ll be there to partner with you any way that I can”.

The Never Again movement is of course not the first organization advocating gun control in the US. One of the largest and most recognized ones is the Brady Campaign, which was formed in

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60 Gregory Korte, “Trump signs bill reversing Obama rule to ban gun purchases by mentally ill”, USA Today, February 28, 2018
61 John Bacon, “Obama thank Parkland shooting survivors for ‘resilience, resolve’ in handwritten letter”, USA Today, March 22, 2018
62 @BarackObama, We are grieving with Parkland. But we are not powerless, Twitter, February 15, 2018
63 @BarackObama, Michelle and I are so inspired by all the young people who made today’s marches happen, Twitter, March 24, 2018
64 Deirdre Walsh and Tom LoBianco, “Nearly 15 hours later, Democratic senator ends filibuster over guns”, CNN, June 16, 2016
65 Andrew Dunn, “Sen. Murphy on Florida shooting: Congress ‘responsible for a level of mass atrocity’ in US”, CNN, February 14, 2018
66 Chris Murphy, United States Senator for Connecticut, “Murphy statement on ‘March For Our Lives’”, [press release], March 24, 2018
2001 as a coalition of previous organizations like Million Mom March and the Handgun Control Inc. The organization has a clearly stated goal of cutting gun deaths in half by 2025. The organization both participated in March For Our Lives and a few days later launched an initiative for youth engagement stating that: “It’s impossible to listen to these young leaders without being inspired [...] and we want nothing more than to amplify their efforts”. Everytown For Gun Safety is another important actor in the US gun control movement, combining the two organizations Mayors Against Illegal Guns and Moms Demand Actions for Gun Sense in America. They have also been active supporters of the Never Again movement and March For Our Lives through providing structural support and financial resources for young organizers of sibling marches all over the US.

On the subject of allies, I would also argue that there is another type of allies that have helped the movement advance its cause, providing it with resources and, not least, space in media. Since the movement itself has used social media to mobilize and spread its message, actors influential in those channels with the ability to help the movement reach even more people should be another important factor. In this category, we find celebrities like talk show host Ellen DeGeneres who has supported both general gun control legislation and the Never Again movement on her Twitter account with 77 million followers. She has also invited spokespersons from the movement as guests in her talk show on a few occasions. Social media profile Kim Kardashian West called for Congressional action after the shooting and announced her support for the students and March For Our Lives, reaching out to almost 60 million followers. Apart from media space, March For Our Lives has also received help in the form of financial donations and public endorsements from celebrities like Oprah Winfrey and George Clooney.

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67 Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, About brady, accessed May 11, 2018
68 Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, Brady Campaign Statement on March For Our Lives, March 25, 2018
69 Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, Brady Campaign Launches Youth Engagement Initiative Following the March For Our Lives, March 28, 2018
70 Everytown For Gun Safety, We are Everytown for Gun Safety, accessed May 11, 2018
71 Everytown For Gun Safety, ‘March For Our Lives’ Sibling Marches to be Held Across the US and Globally, March 6, 2018
72 @TheEllenShow, Twitter
73 @Kim Kardashian, We owe it to our children and our teachers to keep them safe while at school, Twitter, February 14, 2018
74 @KimKardashian, So ready to march today!, Twitter, March 24, 2018
75 Sandra Gonzalez, “Oprah, Steven Spielberg also donating to March For Our Lives, following George Clooney’s pledge”, CNN, February 21, 2018
Rosalind Göthberg  
Department of Government  
Uppsala University

It is thus clear that there have been, and still are, advocates for gun control within the US polity and civil society who have been fighting for this issue a long time. These have welcomed and supported the Never Again movement and its actions, acting as important allies. The Parkland students have also gained support from less traditional allies, such as celebrities with large social media profiles and financial resources.

**Successful Framing**

From the start, spokespersons of the Never Again movement have been very clear on what they consider the problem to be: non-restrictive gun laws which make it way too easy to access weapons. They are advocating for a general ban on assault weapons, turning against the fact that it is at all possible for civilians to buy semi-automatic weapons with high capacity magazines and bump stock devices which turns them fully automatic. While others, like NRA spokesperson Dana Loesch in the CNN town hall meeting, tried to focus on the shooter and his mental instability, calling him things like “insane monster”, “crazy” and “nuts”, the students have kept on focusing on weapons as the main issue. Emma González said at an anti-gun rally just days after the shooting that “...this isn’t just a mental health issue. He wouldn't have hurt that many students with a knife”, making it clear that these weapons are the core problem. With a magnitude of possible solutions being suggested in the debate, this is what the students keep coming back to, as another student activist called Alex Wind argued in his March For Our Lives speech: “We would not need metal detectors, and clear backpacks, and more weapons on our streets if there weren’t weapons of war in the hand of civilians”. Even though they acknowledge that there are other important factors as well and they do support measures like background checks to avoid future mass shootings they are saying that the only thing all the mass shootings have in common is the weapons.

The location of blame and responsibility is also clear in the movement’s framing. First of all, it lies with politicians not doing enough to prevent mass shootings like this from happening. This is

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76 CNN, “*CNN town hall in wake of Florida school shooting*” [video], Youtube, February 21, 2018  
77 CNN, “*Florida student to NRA and Trump: ‘We call BS’* [video], Youtube, February 17 2018  
78 March For Our Lives, “*Alex Wind Speaks at March For Our Lives - ‘Bullets Do Not Discriminate’* [video], Youtube, March 28, 2018  
79 March For Our Lives, “*Cameron Kasky Speaks at March For Our Lives - ‘We Are the Change’* [video], Youtube, March 28, 2018
also presented as a democratic issue, connected to the gun control paradox. One of the questions asked by the older brother of one of the victims during the CNN town hall meeting was: “If a majority of Americans support stricter gun control regulations but our elected officials, who are supposed to represent the people, have done nothing, does this mean that our democracy is broken?” \(^{80}\) The second major source of blame in the students framing is the National Rifle Association and the fact that politicians are being financially supported by the organization. The message directed to these politicians to stop accepting NRA money, which the movement claim is causing them to act in NRA’s interest, has been consistent from the first rally. One of the most spectacular examples of this happened during the town hall meeting with student Cameron Kasky demanding Republican Senator Marco Rubio to answer if he will stop accepting donations from the NRA. Kasky also said that “this isn’t about red and blue […] this is about people who are for making a difference to save us and people who are against it and prefer money”\(^{81}\).

Turning to prognostic frames, there are two main ways the students frame the solution to this problem. The first one is in terms of the legislative changes they would like to see: a ban on assault rifles or semi-automatic weapons with high-capacity magazines and on the bump stocks that can turn a semi-automatic weapon fully automatic. They also argue for stricter background checks for anyone buying a weapon. They seldom get into specific technicalities but keep repeating this in a pretty simple, straightforward way. The second kind of prognostic frame they keep repeating, which also is a way to achieve this legislative change is the message to everyone supporting the cause to get involved in politics through voting. This is especially directed to first-time voters like themselves who the movement has encouraged to register to vote since their first appearances. During the speeches at March For Our Lives, the students claimed that they are “going to make this the voting issue”\(^{82}\) and if the politicians don’t push for stricter gun laws or keep ignoring the movement for it “we will vote them out”\(^{83}\).

\(^{80}\) CNN, “CNN town hall in wake of Florida school shooting

\(^{81}\) Ibid

\(^{82}\) March For Our Lives, “David Hogg Speaks at March For Our Lives - ‘We Say No More’” [video], Youtube, March 28, 2018

\(^{83}\) March For Our Lives, “Delaney Tarr Speaks at March For Our Lives - ‘They Want Us To Forget’ [video], March 28, 2018
The “warrant of the dead”-rhetoric that Obama used in the Sandy Hook-aftermath is commonly used as a motivational frame by the Parkland students as well. They are repeatedly talking about the 17 people who died, repeating their names, revealing personal details about the victims and making it clear that even though the issue of gun control is larger than this specific shooting no one must forget about the lives that were taken. What they also do is to clearly state that they are victims too, suggesting that the ethical responsibility to act is also towards them. They do not shy away from describing their own experiences of the shooting, providing an emotional rationale for action. There is a certain amount of shame directed to the previous generation. During the town hall meeting, one of the survivors first described how he and his classmates on multiple occasions have been forced to hide from shooters in their school and then asked Senator Rubio: “Why do we have to be the ones to do this? Why do we have to speak out to the capital? Why do we have to march on Washington, just to save innocent lives?”.

There is a powerful message of hope in the student’s speeches. They are framing their movement as the beginning of a revolution and speaking as if they are sure that they will succeed. In her very first speech, just days after the shooting Emma González said: “We are going to be the kids you read about in textbooks [...] because we are going to be the last mass shooting” and “if all our government and president can do is to send thoughts and prayers, then it’s time for victims to be the change that we need to see”. This signals that change is not only something the students wish for but that they also strongly believe in which creates a convincing message of hope for the audience as well.

Even though there is a lot of talk about the shooting that started this particular movement, focusing on the present and community dimensions, it has from the start been combined with the dimensions framing gun violence as a larger issue affecting the future and whole society. The name “Never Again” and the focus on action does help in presenting this as a future problem that will continue to affect a lot of people if nothing changes. The movement also tries to avoid framing this as just an issue for their community or even schools in general but as a societal issue for all Americans. In fact, during the March For Our Lives, they stated that “We openly recognize that we are privileged individuals that wouldn’t have received as much attention if it

84 CNN, “CNN town hall in wake of Florida school shooting”
85 CNN, “Florida student to NRA and Trump: ‘We call BS’”
weren’t for the affluence of our city. Because of that, however, we share the stage today and forever with those who have always stared down the barrel of a gun”. This statement referred to the fact that apart from students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, the speakers during the march were young people from areas with a lower socioeconomic status and higher crime rate where gun violence is an even broader issue affecting people’s everyday lives.

Comparing this to previous research on issue framing from the gun control movement, the students here have been using frames that have proved to be successful in the past. The focus lies on safety and protection, frames that appeal to a broad audience and are emotionally resonant. Even though the movement spokespersons are clear on the fact that they consider the issue of gun control to be larger than only about school safety, the child protection frame becomes naturally prominent since the triggering event was a school shooting and all of the public advocates of the movement are young, often referring to themselves as children. While tapping into these previous successful frames, they have also been avoiding those that historically have been easy for the gun rights side to take over through not getting into discussions on technical details. Moreover, there is hardly any mentioning of gun control as a crime control issue.

What seems to be a new way of framing the issue compared to the previous debate is to talk about it as a democracy problem, connecting it to the gun control paradox (without using that term). The constant encouragement for people to register and vote would be a way to deal with this and the fact that it has been repeated in all the major speeches makes it a very prominent frame. It also helps frame the issue as a problem that will affect the future and society as a whole, directing attention away from frames presenting it as a present, community problem which according to the previous research is how school shootings mostly have been framed in media in the past.

Discussion and the Gun Control Participation Paradox

When examining all of these different factors regarding political opportunity structures and successful issue framing, each one of them seem to have been present to at least some extent in the case of the Never Again movement. The movement consists of new actors who have gained

86 March For Our Lives, “Jaclyn Corin Speaks at March For Our Lives - ‘Parkland is My Home’” {video}, Youtube, March 28, 2018
access to the debate partially because of social media and other similar movements, there have been rifts within the political elites which might have been favorable for the movement’s impact, it has gained influential allies both within and outside the polity and it has been able to frame the issue of gun control in both previously successful and new ways. Apart from that, the Never Again movement seems to have succeeded in areas in which according to Goss, the gun control movement has failed in the past; securing patronage, using resonant, culturally appealing issue frames and delivering movement building victories.

The patronage Goss writes about is closely connected to what Tarrow calls influential allies. According to these scholars, some of the roles of social movement allies are to serve as mediators between the polity and the movement, to provide moral authority to the cause and to provide the movement with resources like money and volunteers. The Never Again movement appear to have had allies able to serve all of these purposes. They have allies in the polity like Chris Murphy, advocating gun control in Congress which also Barack Obama did during his time as president. They have received financial and volunteer support from other established gun control organizations, like the Brady Campaign and Everytown, as well as from celebrities. Public support from influential people as Barack Obama should also provide some kind of moral authority apart from help with spreading the movement’s message to a larger audience. As argued above, when examining a movement who to a large extent have been mobilizing through social media, the allies they have had in the form of social media profiles with large networks and millions of followers might also have played an important role.

The student’s position as new actors has made it possible for them to use old frames in a new way or with new kind of effects. First of all, the fact that they are so young does in itself contribute to seeing gun control as an issue of child-protection and them talking about their own experiences makes the frame even more emotionally resonant. It also makes it harder for opponents to accuse the movement of manipulating emotions, which happened when Obama used the “warrant of the dead”-rhetoric, since the students are survivors themselves of the school shooting they are talking about and friends or relatives to many of the dead. Furthermore, because they are victims themselves they have been able to use the same kind of rhetoric but with the implication that the responsibility to change the gun control laws is not only one towards the dead but also towards themselves, the rest of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas
students and all others belonging to the “mass shooting generation” whose lives has been so much affected by the gun violence. They are thereby using a kind of frame which has been successful in the past, child-protection, but without being vulnerable to the same kind of critique as Obama was. This, together with the democracy frame which actually acknowledges the gun control paradox could possibly be the kind of resonant, culturally appealing issue frame Goss claims have been missing.

The incremental, movement building victories Goss mentions can also be found in the case of the Never Again movement, the changed gun laws in Florida and Vermont. Even though this has not been enough for the movement and the new laws have not included all of their claims, they can be seen as a step in the right direction, especially considering these states previous position as states with weak gun legislation and with governors who have openly supported gun rights as well as the NRA. Furthermore, I have not been able to find any evidence of less restrictive gun legislation being suggested or passed, which according to previous research for example happened after the Sandy Hook shooting. Whether this is a direct cause of divisions within the political elite or not would require another kind of study but the facts stand than in a context with political divides not least within the Republican party, some Republican politicians appear to have changed their positions on gun control legislation. One interesting aspect here is the previous research findings pointing to how Republicans are more sensitive to different framings of the gun control issue, with that in mind this might be seen as another evidence of the movements successful gun control framing.

**Conclusion**

In a debate that for a long time has been dominated by the gun rights side and the NRA, resulting in the gun control paradox, the Never Again movement seems to have been able to provide a new hope for all those people yearning for stricter gun laws. This thesis has through social movement theories attempted to provide a possible explanation for how this has happened. Before making my conclusions, I want to acknowledge the fact that there are a number of possible contributing factors that I have not been able to examine in this study. I therefore do not claim that I have provided a full explanation for the movements emergence and initial success.
but I do believe that I have managed to solve a piece of the puzzle and highlighted a few important aspects.

The Never Again movement, the young survivors of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School have through a combination of political opportunities and successful issue framing at least for a short period of time been able to break the gun control participation paradox. If this will turn into a sustained movement that actually manages to change gun control legislation all over America remains to be seen and as mentioned in the beginning, this study does not make any such claims or predictions. What it does show however is that the movement has been working within a context of favorable political opportunities which they consciously or not have been taking advantage of and managed to frame their issue in a successful way. They have also sparked new life in the gun debate and positioned themselves and their whole generation as new actors who, hopefully, will continue working towards stricter gun control legislation to prevent future tragedies like the mass shooting at their high school. Then, maybe, Emma Gonzaléz words that these activities are “going to be the kids your read about in text books”, not only in this thesis, will come true.
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Department of Government
Uppsala University


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Department of Government
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