

How are Public Mass Shootings Defined, Framed and Responded to Across
Europe?

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Abstract

Public mass shootings (PMS) frequently elicit public and political debates, yet conflicting perspectives and definitional issues, often based on arbitrary fatality thresholds, hinder understanding. This thesis addresses a gap in existing research, providing a comprehensive comparative analysis by exploring how PMS are defined, framed and responded to across multiple European countries.

This research adopted a mixed methods approach. Combining analysis of 18 PMS incidents across four case study countries: the UK, Germany, Belgium and Finland, using document analysis of academic articles, media sources, reports and parliamentary debates, with 11 qualitative semi-structured interviews. Participants included those in law enforcement, policy experts, researchers, interest groups and victims. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) provided the theoretical foundation, viewed through a Critical Realist (CR) lens, to examine the factors influencing agenda setting and policy formation.

Thematic analysis of the research revealed how the three independent, yet interdependent problem, policy and politics streams align to produce circumstances favourable to policy change. Key themes emerged, including the 'something must be done' phenomenon, definitional issues, cultural and social factors and the long-term impact. The study reveals significant variations in responses influenced by political culture, stakeholder/interest group engagement, and public sentiment.

The research extends the MSF by introducing novel concepts including 'cultural congeniality' and the 'something must be done' phenomenon. It proposes a new victim typology and a more inclusive PMS definition, taking into consideration the perpetrator's intent and the broader societal impact that extends beyond fatality thresholds.

These findings offer valuable insights for policymakers addressing PMS. This study underscores the importance of balancing immediate public demands with

long-term evidence-based solutions. It emphasises the need for inclusive policymaking processes that consider diverse stakeholder perspectives, particularly those of victims. By understanding the complex interplay of problem framing, policy solutions, and political dynamics, decisionmakers can craft more refined and potentially more effective responses to these tragic events.

By integrating diverse perspectives, including the seldom heard voices of victims, this study offers a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to understanding PMS and related policy formation, contributing both theoretical knowledge and practical policy development.

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Authors Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and has not previously been submitted for any other degree at Staffordshire University or another institution. Some parts of this thesis have been published in peer reviewed journals or presented at conferences. The materials produced for journals or conferences were developed during the completion of this thesis and they are listed in [appendix 12](#).



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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
AOAV	Action on Armed Violence
BSSC	British Sports Shooting Council
CDC	Centre for Disease Control
CoR	European Committee of the Regions
EFFECT	Examination of Firearms and Forensics in Europe and aCross Territories
EUCPN	European Crime Prevention Network
FACE	European Federation for Hunting and Conservation
GCN	Gun Control Network
HFD	Historic, Folkloric or Decorative value
JESIP	Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles
NABIS	National Ballistics Intelligence Service
NCVC	National Centre for Victims of Crime
NPCC	National Police Chief's Council
OLA	Office of Legislative Affairs
PMS	Public Mass Shooting
POST	Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology
PRIO	Peace Research Institute Oslo
SEESAC	South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons
URDF	University Researcher Development Framework
YLE	Yleisradio Oy (Finnish Broadcasting Company)

Chapter 1 : Introduction

“it’s essential to learn lessons from tragedy - even when that involves the hard task of facing up to the reality of what happened and how individuals, communities and organisations responded” (North, 2000)

1.1 Background - Rationale for Exploring Public Mass Shootings

Whilst conducting a literature review on gun enabled crime for the EFFECT (Examination of Firearms and Forensics aCross Europe) project, several articles discussing public mass shootings (PMS) were reviewed. They revealed how variations in terminology and definitions influenced how incidents were counted/recorded but also determined if they were considered a mass shooting and as such were ‘deserving’ of political attention. Incidents where the perpetrator kills up to three people are often described as single, double and triple murders and are not recorded as mass shootings. One example would be the Imatra PMS in December 2016, “Court Seals Documents as Imatra Triple-Killings Trial Begins” (YLE, 2017), discussed in Chapter 4.

Different actors define the same situation differently, consequently different solutions exist to any policy issue, the question is why one is selected over others (Hoefer, 2022). Definitional complexities are compounded by a rather arbitrary fatality threshold. This hierarchy of death means some PMS are excluded from data sets and literature, leading to issues with reporting, recording and understanding. Reliable data is not only notoriously difficult to obtain, but also often not compatible or comparable with other data sources and can lead to an incomplete understanding. Therefore, this research is driven by a desire to understand why certain PMS lead to legislative change while others do not. Taking into consideration the ongoing resistance to strengthening firearms legislation by examining the qualitative differences in responses to PMS, this research aims to understand the deeper societal contexts that shape these events and our responses to them (Hall and McLean, 2009, p.333). This holistic approach extends beyond simply analysing the mediating factors to understand which events matter under what circumstances, and why certain incidents appear more worthy of attention, addressing the complex interplay of cultural, moral and regulatory processes.

1.2 Definition

Whilst there are a variety of terms, there is no universally accepted definition for mass shooting. Therefore, to fully explore how PMS are framed and responded to, the following definition has been adopted and will be used throughout the thesis.

PMS are: 'shootings that occur in public or semi-public spaces, perpetrated by one perpetrator, resulting in three or more victims randomly selected, with at least one fatality. Public refers to an open public space or public building, such as a school. Victim refers to those fatally shot and also injured; however, it excludes the perpetrator. Focusing on incidents with one perpetrator the definition excludes institutionalised killings such as war crimes, acts of political terrorism, hate crime or organised crime gangs (Fox and Levin, 2003), as these are included in other studies, and to include them would be beyond the scope of this research.

1.3 Thesis Topic

Firearms continue to cause significant harm, an estimated 223,300 people or 38% were killed with firearms globally in 2018 (Small Arms Survey, 2020). Firearms are used in 46.3% of all homicides and 32.3% of direct conflict deaths (Global Burden of Armed Violence, 2015). Despite international efforts to restrict access, at least legally, to dangerous firearms, their impact is severe (European Commission, 2012). Firearms are used in many contexts, recreational, military, sporting but also within the relational and criminal spheres (Duquet, 2016), and there is no European country that has not been affected by firearms violence. In Europe alone, 1,150 people are fatally shot every year (Duquet, 2016, p. 3). Nonetheless, much research focuses on the USA, whilst European studies are comparatively limited (Duquet, 2016, p. 4).

Despite a considerable volume of literature about firearm crime, PMS receive relatively little academic consideration, perhaps because we are so accustomed to reading and hearing about mass murder and particularly by firearms, not just in the USA but more frequently across many European countries (Nurmi, 2014a, p. 8). This lack of criminological attention has resulted in limited reviews of the literature and a paucity of knowledge, and this impedes both practitioners and academics (Rocque, 2012). What has been written often focuses on the psychological profile of the perpetrator (Wilson, 2016; Mortimer, 2020) on their social isolation (Blum

and Jaworski, 2016), masculinity (Kalish and Kimmel, 2010), mental ill health (Metzl and MacLeish, 2015; Knoll and Annas, 2016), and the impact the media has on the portrayal of mass shootings (Wheeler, 2016, p. 4). There is little attention on firearms control and specifically policy and legislative reform following mass shootings, for notable exceptions see Hurka (2017), or Smith (2006).

Most scholarly and expert sources agree that mass shootings are rare violent crimes (Duwe, 2004; Bowers, Holmes and Rhom, 2010; Bjelopera *et al.*, 2013; Blackman and Baird, 2014; Doran, 2014; Shultz *et al.*, 2014; Lankford, 2016a). They are, nonetheless, the most visible form of firearms violence (Studdert *et al.*, 2017). They often occur in a public space that is very much 'close to home', unlike much of what transpires in the criminal underworld that is often at a distance from everyday life (Duquet 2016, p. 3). Fox and Levin (2003, p. 49), however, argue that it is not as rare an occurrence as it is often assumed to be. An assertion supported more recently by Nurmi (2014a, p. 3) and Böckler *et al.* (2013) who discuss the rising frequency and increase in PMS, primarily in North America and Europe, in the last two decades (Böckler *et al.*, 2013, p. 9-11; Nurmi, 2014a; Johnston and Joy, 2016; NCVS, 2018).

PMS as acts of extreme violence, frequently illicit public and political debates (Chappell 2014) whilst at the same time elevating fear and anger (Studdert *et al.*, 2017). Unlike conventional crimes, PMS are not typically motivated by criminal profit or terrorist ideologies (Bjelopera *et al.*, 2013). This definition of PMS for the purpose of this research, is similar to Levin and Madfis' (2009, p.1227) definition: anti-social, non-state sponsored killings of multiple victims in a single episode at closely related locations. It excludes politically or ideologically motivated shootings, such as Utøya in Norway in 2011, and Paris in 2015; or those under the guise of hate crime, such as Orlando in 2017, or terrorist attacks, which although less frequent, often result in higher fatalities (Duquet, 2016). However, such PMS were excluded from this study.

PMS provoke intense debate and media attention, often resonating in political culture (Böckler *et al.*, 2013). At times they provide an impetus for legislative amendments to European frameworks and policies (Duquet, 2016; Hurka, 2017),

often in distinct ways to routine firearm violence. Hurka and Nebel (2013) suggest that PMS are examples of external shocks that have particular significance for firearms policy reform, aligning with Kingdon's (1984) Multiple Streams Framework (MSF), which suggests that such events can increase the likelihood of policy change (discussed in full in Section 2.2).

High-profile PMS in Europe can act as 'signal crimes', altering societies perceptions of safety and security (Innes, 2004). Some incidents, such as Hungerford, Dunblane and Antwerp, prompted legislative changes. However, other PMS, despite multiple fatalities generate only intensely brief media attention without policy impact. This raises the question: what events matter under what circumstances?

The impact of PMS is often underestimated, definitional issues hinder accurate counting and comparison across countries (Webster and Vernick, 2013, p. 166; Schildkraut and Elsass, 2016). Despite widespread use of the term 'mass shooting', by the media, government papers and scientific and psychological journals, no universal definition exists (Turner, Lockey and Rehn, 2016, p. 1). This lack of consensus impedes understanding of the firearm crime landscape and policy impacts. A standardised definition or typology of mass shooting in Europe is crucial for developing a stronger evidence base to reduce harm (Shultz *et al.*, p. 2014).

1.4 Research Aim and Objectives

Aim - How are public mass shootings (PMS) defined, framed and responded to across Europe?

Through the use of mixed methods this thesis aims to take a holistic approach to explore PMS, how they are defined, conceptualised and responded to, and how this shapes policy/legislative change. This approach ensured the following objectives were met: (1) To develop an in-depth understanding of PMS to illustrate the nature and extent across Europe; (2) To examine key terminology and definitions, to ascertain how PMS are categorised and understood, and how variations in definitions affect responses, and the proposal of a new, more

comprehensive definition; (3) To explore policy-making and political practices/legislative responses following PMS to develop an in-depth understanding; and (4) To open up a conversation/narrative to discern and explain responses to PMS to develop an in-depth understanding of key stakeholders perspectives of PMS (law enforcement community, researchers, lobby/interest groups and victims).

This research examines what influences perceptions of the severity of PMS, and subsequently how they are responded to. The insights gained from this investigation are crucial for assessing what impact this has on our broader understanding of PMS, and the implications for policy and legislative changes. The overarching research question guiding this study is: *How are PMS framed and conceptualised and how does this shape policy/legislative change?* I will focus on the following five questions to address this:

RQ1: What is the nature and extent of PMS within the selected areas?

RQ2: What influences perceptions of event severity and subsequent responses?

RQ3: What factors (political, economic, cultural, location, victim status) matter and under what circumstances?

RQ4: How do narratives/discourse in parliamentary debates and the media influence policy change?

RQ5: How are PMS understood and responded to by participants?

The research objectives will help to answer the research question, and the way each objective contributes to addressing the research question is set out below.

1. To develop an in-depth understanding of PMS to illustrate the nature and extent across Europe

This objective will provide a comprehensive overview of the nature and extent of PMS across Europe, examining historical data, statistics, and case studies to analyse patterns, trends, and variations.

2. To examine key terminology and definitions and ascertain how PMS are categorised and understood, and how variations in definitions affect responses.

This objective involves the examination of different definitions, legal frameworks, and variations in stances on PMS across Europe. It will shed light on the factors that influence how PMS are understood in different contexts.

3. To explore policymaking and legislative responses

This objective aims to explore the policymaking processes and legislative response following PMS in Europe. The analysis of existing laws, regulations and policy measures implemented in different countries, will provide insights into the approaches and strategies employed to address PMS. This exploration will help uncover similarities, differences, and evolving practices across Europe.

4. To discern and explain responses to PMS

This objective focuses on responses to PMS across Europe and opening up a conversation and narrative. It will involve an analysis of media coverage, public discourse, and societal reactions to gain a comprehensive understanding of perspectives on PMS. Exploring diverse viewpoints will help to shed light on the societal, cultural, and political factors that shape responses to these incidents.

The research objectives were addressed through a multi-stage approach as follows:

1. Developing an in-depth understanding of PMS across Europe (Chapter 4)
2. Examining key terminology and definitions (Chapter 1, 2, 5, 6, 7)
3. Outlining the research design, data collection and analytical approach (Chapter 3)
4. Exploring policymaking and legislative responses using the MSF-Critical Realist (CR) framework (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7)
5. Analysing responses to PMS through participant interviews and case studies (Chapters 5, 6, 7)

By addressing these objectives, it will be possible to develop an in-depth understanding of how PMS are defined, framed and responded to across Europe, considering factors such as variations in definitions, policymaking approaches, and societal perspectives.

Focusing on these questions will ensure that the topic of investigation is fully interrogated and that this assists in the production of credible and defensible

findings. Importantly, it will also provide a substantive understanding of the nature and extent of PMS and how they are defined, framed and responded to across Europe. Is our understanding of PMS limited by definitions, and what impact does this have on legislative change?

1.5 Thesis structure

In order to answer the research questions, this thesis has been organised into eight chapters. This Chapter introduces the research topic under investigation and in doing so presents the purpose, aim and objectives.

Chapter Two provides a preliminary review of the literature, covering a wide body of scholarship, to provide context to the study. It begins with an exploration of terminology and concepts related to PMS, definitional issues, false positives and negatives, victim status and location of the incidents. The MSF continues to be a key reference point in public policy literature (Béland and Howlett, 2016; Cairney and Jones, 2016; Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016; De Wals, Espinoza-Moya and Béland, 2019) and was selected given its value as a framework and method of analysis for policy change, a discussion relating to the relevant MSF literature is also located here.

Chapter Three addresses the methodological considerations. This includes justification for mixed methods, combining a numbers-based approach, with Critical Realism (CR) and qualitative data, to help conceptualise the issue of PMS and policy responses. It presents the methods of data collection and analysis, outlining Stage One, and the use of case studies, and Stage Two the qualitative semi-structured interviews of the participants. Qualitative research using CR as a framework ensured a flexible process of coding and data analysis that is consistent with CR ontology and epistemology (Bhaskar, 1989).

The case studies are presented in Chapter Four. Cavadino and Dignan's (2006a) welfare typology was used to organise the selected countries according to regime type, Great Britain as Neo-Liberal, Germany and Belgium as Conservative Corporatism, and Finland as Social Democratic. Kingdon's MSF was used to

analyse catalytic cases, which led to significant changes, and static cases, which did not result in major policy change.

Chapters Five and Six present the findings of the qualitative interviews. In Chapter Five, the findings are organised and presented according to the MSF themes, whilst Chapter Six presents the emergent themes. The findings of the data chapter and the interpretation of the findings are drawn together in Chapter Seven, in addition to explanations as to why certain PMS led to policy change when others did not.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis. It begins by revisiting the aim and research questions and presenting an overview of the study's strengths and limitations, before summarising the key findings and contributions to existing knowledge. Concluding with implications for policy, practice and further research, and recommendations that advocate for attempts to limit the number of firearms available for public use, and in doing so, hopefully the number of victims of firearm violence.

Chapter 2 : Literature Review

2.1 Terminology and Definitions Introduction

Mass shootings are a broad concept (Bjelopera *et al.*, 2013, p. 3), and there are varying definitions used by researchers, which has resulted in greater challenges when attempting to put such events into context (Schildkraut and Elsass, 2016). Cultural differences can affect how incidents and their definitions are socially constructed in varying nations and regions (Hall and McLean, 2009, p. 314). Nurmi defines mass shootings as a 'global phenomenon' (2014a, p. 12), and they consist of many variables that require different analysis. A combination of factors means most shootings fit into one or more categories of mass shootings (see Table 2.1 below) but are also excluded from others. However, despite numerous authors and organisations collecting data on the phenomenon, there is still a lack of scholarly consensus on how to define mass shootings (Bridges, Tober and Brazzell, 2023).

Table 2:1 Variations in Terminology and Fatality Thresholds
(Authors own data)

Focusing on single perpetrator public mass shootings (PMS) and how they are responded to across Europe, this chapter will provide an overview of the relevant literature, examining how PMS are defined and how this affects our understanding. This chapter begins with an examination of terminology and definitional ambiguities.

2.1.1 Terminology and Definitional Ambiguities

There are varying dimensions of the phenomenon of mass shootings (Muschert, 2007), and the purpose of this chapter is to examine the definitions and concepts

applied to, and types/sub-types of, mass shootings, establishing key terminology and contextualising the issue. To address this aim the researcher reviewed both publicly available and open-source data and existing literature, various governmental reports, academic journal articles and reports. Within these sources a variety of terms were discussed; civilian public mass shootings [CPMS] (Czaja *et al.*, 2023), spree killing (HMIC, 1987), multiple victim public shootings (Lott and Landes, 1996), mass murder, mass shooting (Webster and Vernick, 2013; Duquet, 2016), rampage shooting (Newman *et al.*, 2004), mass shooting episode (Shultz *et al.*, 2014, p. 4), amok killings (Levin and Madfis, 2009; Kelly, 2012; Kellner, 2013), massacres, autogenic massacres (Mullen, 2004; Bowers, Holmes and Rhom, 2009, p. 60), mass public shootings, PMS (Lankford, 2016a), active shooter incidents (Blair and Schweit, 2013), pseudo commando mass murder (Dietz, 1986) mission-orientated maximum violence (O'Toole, 2014), and Mass Casualty Incidents [MCI] (Cowan *et al.*, 2020; US Department of Veteran Affairs, 2020). Schultz *et al.* (2014, p. 2) define mass shootings as 'intentional, planned, perpetrated shooting events involving the use of firearms to kill or injure multiple victims, typically carried out in a school, worksite or other public venue', this has included churches and religious buildings. More recently, Anisin's (2022a) work defined a mass shooting according to Silva and Capellan's (2019) criteria, whereby a mass shooting is one that included four or more fatalities, and one or more offender, in closely related locations and not related to criminal activity.

As we can see, terminology and inclusion and exclusion criteria vary across researchers, resulting in somewhat different, but overlapping, populations being studied (Langman, 2009), which then have different consequences for research findings, impacting upon our understanding of the level of firearms violence and increasing the challenges associated with conducting meta-studies (Harding, Fox and Mehta, 2002, p. 177-178; Larkin, 2009; Kelly, 2010; Lankford, 2012; Böckler *et al.*, 2013, p. 3-6; Nurmi, 2014b). How PMS are defined can reduce or increase the number of incidents that are recorded (Lott and Landes, 1996), and then how they appear within data sets, as discussed in the following section that explores false positives and negatives.

2.1.2 False Positives and Negatives

Those who study PMS face a number of challenges. Discrepancies in how PMS are classified and recorded can have a significant impact on how they are understood, particularly when trying to ascertain how valid and reliable the methods are for measuring their frequency and characteristics (Webster and Vernick, 2013, p. 166; Kopel, 2020).

Should a search term have multiple meanings, false positives may occur, thereby potentially producing results that do not necessarily meet the definition (Soothill and Grover, 1997; Deacon, 2007; Schildkraut, 2014). An example of this would be in 2000 in Branneburg, Germany: a teacher was killed by a student with a sword, yet this was included in a timeline of worldwide school shootings on one website 'one teacher killed by a 15-year-old student, who then shot himself, the shooter has been in a coma since' (Timeline of Worldwide Mass shootings, 2018). Larkin (2009) includes a knife attack in a Swedish high school (2001) as a rampage school shooting. Schildkraut and Elsass (2016), in their discussion of the Falun shooting in 1994, listed it as a shooting that occurred in Switzerland and not Sweden, and similarly USA statistics from the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) would include a firearm incident at a school bus stop as well as a gang shooting that took place outside a school (Weiner, 2013).

Conversely, false negatives could occur if a search term is too narrow; news articles, and therefore PMS, could be excluded because they do not meet the criteria. To illustrate this, the Independent reported that there had been no mass shootings in Switzerland since 2001 (Brueck, 2018). However, there were three further PMS, Daillon in 2013, Menznau in 2013, and Wurlingen in 2015. Similarly, Nurmi (2014a) asserts that there have been no PMS in Finland since the two school shootings, yet there were PMS in Espoo in 2009, Hyvinkaa in 2012, and Imatra in 2016. The aforementioned comments highlight how incidents seldom fit neatly into one category of 'mass' shooting. The possibility of false positives and negatives increases the likelihood that the list of events that meet definitions of a mass shooting is not fully exhaustive.

There are also conflicting perspectives regarding what constitutes a 'mass' shooting, and the variety of terms used to describe the phenomenon is considerable. Additionally, inconsistency in the number of victims recorded can lead to further confusion, as discussed below, but first, a brief discussion of PMS definitions and fatality thresholds in relation to the American problem.

2.1.3 An American Problem

Mass shootings and firearm control, or lack thereof, feature frequently in discourse relating to the USA. Perhaps unsurprisingly for a country that boasted 51,438 retail gun shops, compared to 36,569 grocery stores (Date, Thomas and Ryan, 2012). Indeed, the dominant narrative often reflects the views of authors such as Kleck (1991) and Lott (1998), who suggest that the more firearms Americans possess, the lower the crime rate will be. PMS have been described as a part of American life, akin to baseball or apple pie (Alvarez and Bachman, 2014). This is undoubtedly due to the number of mass shootings that have occurred. Between 1966 and 2012 nearly a third of the world's mass shootings took place in the USA, a country with approximately 5% of the world's population, yet 31% of all mass shootings (Willingham and Ahmed, 2017).

Much of what has been written about PMS focuses on the USA. School shootings are often constructed as moral panics by the news media (Burns and Crawford, 1999), which intensifies the debate surrounding firearms legislation (Schildkraut, Elsass and Stafford, 2015). In the USA where the preponderance of research has been conducted (Chappell, 2014; Nurmi, 2014a), mass shootings are frequently referred to as active shootings or rampage shootings (Lankford, 2016a). However, they are quantified by many according to the number of fatalities. Definitions often specify a minimum of four fatalities in a single incident by an individual (Krouse and Richardson, 2015). It is this definition that is often used in studies of mass shootings (Reuter and Mouzos, 2003; Lankford, 2016a). This corresponds with the definition of mass murder originally cited by the FBI (2008), and as such, is frequently adopted within much of the mass shooting literature (Fox and Levin, 2003; Krouse and Richardson, 2015; Duquet, 2016; Lankford, 2016; National Centre for Victims of Crime [NCVC], 2018). This was changed to three or more victims in 2012; however, many continue to use the original definition (Lott, 2018).

There is also a lack of clarity as to whether the definition fatality threshold includes the perpetrator or not, adding to the confusion and variations in how PMS are classified and recorded. Mass murder involving a single perpetrator indiscriminately shooting at strangers in a public place is the most heavily publicised type, according to Fox and Levin (2003, p. 49), and an important feature of the definition used for this research. PMS may have originally been considered an American problem, however as this research demonstrates, they are not exceptionally an American phenomenon (Lankford, 2016a). Continuing with definitional issues and ambiguity the following section will discuss fatality thresholds, and the impact of defining by numbers.

2.1.4 Defining by Numbers

“Clearly victim numbers, certainly the death, the numbers of death ... the location, any school shooting will always get more media coverage, more political response” (Mick)

The ambiguity in terms of definitions is undoubtedly responsible for the significant variation in numbers of PMS that are observed, dependent upon the individual or organisation that are identifying and analysing them (Duquet, 2016, p. 5). Whilst this research is not concerned with and does not focus on the USA, as discussed in the previous section, PMS are frequently considered an American problem (Lankford, 2016a; Hurka, 2017), even the Hungerford massacre was referred to as an indication of the spread of US gun culture (O'Connor, 1987). It could be argued that PMS are synonymous with the USA, where a large proportion of the research literature originates, along with a rather arbitrary fatality figure, as set out by the FBI definition.

There are also issues with how certain events are reported and recorded, in terms of the number of fatalities and/or injuries. Whilst there were instances where a source might include a different number of fatalities, generally, this was an outlier. However, when researching Erfurt, Winnenden and Liège the number of victims varied considerably (see Tables 2:2, 2:3 and 2:4). In each case the decision was made to select the figure the majority concurred with; in Erfurt, 16 direct victims, no injuries; in Winnenden, 15 fatalities and 9 injured, a total of 24 direct victims;

and in Liège, five fatalities and 125 injured victims, totalling 130 direct victims, discussed in full in Chapter 4.

***Table 2:2 Variations in Victims in Erfurt
(Authors own data)***

***Table 2:3 Variations in Victims in Winnenden
(Authors own data)***

Table 2:4 Variations in Victims in Liège
(Authors own data)

Categorising types of PMS presents several issues due to the complex nature and varying dimensions of the phenomenon (Muschert, 2007). Definitions are often based on multiple factors, including the number of victims, the location, who the victims are, and the perpetrator's motives, although the purpose of this research is not to explore motivational factors. Inconsistency in recording the number of direct victims combined with the variations in how they are defined and subsequently counted, contributes to the lack of understanding regarding the extent and impact of PMS

As discussed previously, PMS definitions usually require an arbitrary 'threshold demarcating the number of victims killed per incident' (Bjelopera *et al.*, 2013, p. 4). For example, individual incidents that involve one perpetrator who kills up to three people are often described as single, double or triple murders, and as such are not recorded as a mass shooting (Bjelopera *et al.*, 2013). This would exclude several of the PMS selected for inclusion in this research, notably Antwerp, which is of particular significance as the shooting accelerated the decision-making process, pushing forward changes to firearms legislation (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015).

There are some who define PMS as any incident where more than five victims die (Chapman *et al.*, 2006, p. 365; Stein, 2007, p. 444). Both Lankford and the

Flemish Peace Institute included PMS of four or more victims in their studies, excluding the perpetrator. Fox and Levin (1998) also state that there must be one perpetrator, four or more victims, occurring in a single event lasting a few minutes to several hours. Reuter and Mouzos (2003) similarly define PMS as the killing of four or more victims by gunshot within a few hours. Bogus (2015), and Follman, Aronsen and Pan (2014) suggest at least four fatalities, including the perpetrator, whilst Bjelopera *et al.* (2013) also suggests it is four, however, exclude the perpetrator. This highlights another issue with how PMS are defined and measured, the inclusion or exclusion of the perpetrator in the number of fatalities. Duquet's (2016, p. 5) definition of a mass shooting is taken to refer to an incident where three or more people are killed by one or more perpetrators in a short period of time, often within a few hours. Whilst Lott and Landes (1996) defined PMS as; shootings that occur in public places where two or more individuals are killed and injured. On the other hand, Action on Armed Violence's (AOAV, 2014a) definition, focuses on a singular incident that occurs outside of a recognised conflict zone, and similar to Lott and Landes (1996), specify the inclusion of two or more individuals who are killed or injured.

More recently, Anisin (2022a) adopts Silva and Capellan's (2019) definition, which can include more than one perpetrator, although notes that it is assumed to be an event carried out by one perpetrator (Anisin, 2022b). Nonetheless, he also acknowledged the value in investigating cases that feature less fatalities, not least in light of the conceptually arbitrary difference between two, three or four fatalities, but equally, to ensure the investigation captures more cases than would ordinarily feature using commonly used thresholds (Anisin, 2022a, p. 2). Differentiating between attempted and completed mass shootings, Anisin (2022a) clarifies that the former refers to those cases with fewer than four fatalities, whilst the latter, four or more fatalities. Anisin (2022b) suggests the figure is three rather than four, although the perpetrator is excluded from the figure in either case.

As shown above, PMS are frequently quantified according to the number of victims. The focus on events with higher fatalities negates the importance of lower magnitude events (Scheithauer and Bondü, 2011). Definitions do not take into consideration the intent. If the perpetrator had succeeded there would be more

fatalities. For example, between 1983 and 2012 the 78 mass shootings in the USA resulted in 547 fatalities (excluding the perpetrator). However, that figure almost doubles (1,023) if both fatalities and injuries are included (Bjelopera *et al.*, 2013). This research, focusing on 18 PMS across four countries between 1987 and 2016 identified 137 fatalities and 260 injuries, a total of 397 direct victims. The PMS in Liège contributed significantly to this total, with 130 direct victims, including five fatalities and 125 injuries (see Figure 2:1 below). This illustrates both the considerable variation in victim numbers, but also the importance of including all victims to accurately portray the perpetrators' intent to cause harm to as many people as possible.

The aforementioned definitions demonstrate how compiling incidents based on arbitrary thresholds may fail to adequately capture the extent of incidents (Bjelopera *et al.*, 2013). This leads to questions regarding what impact this has on our understanding of PMS, what characteristics must an event incorporate in order to qualify as a mass shooting (Hurka, 2017), and what events matter under what circumstances?

Figure 2:1 Fatalities and Injuries
(Authors own data)

This ambiguity in terms of 'mass' highlights a clear need to develop a consensus definition of mass shootings (Schultz *et al.*, 2014) that allows us to synthesise past

studies and position future studies (Muschert, 2007), rather than limiting our understanding by excluding cases that do not have 'enough' victims.

Whilst it has been argued that PMS are not very common and represent a limited proportion of the total homicides in any country (Duquet, 2016, p. 3), the impact is nonetheless considerable.

Despite the random nature, they are often premeditated with the intention of inflicting as much harm as possible (Shultz *et al.*, 2014). Indeed, Kelleher (1997) discusses 'mass murder by intention' (discussed in Section 7.3.1), where fewer than the required number of people were killed, although the intention to murder more was clear. There are many factors that impact upon the survival of those involved, such as the location of wounds, and how long it takes the emergency services to respond. There are also technological advances resulting in fewer victims, thereby minimising by extension the number of PMS that meet the four death criteria (discussed in Chapter 7). There is seldom consideration of those who survive such attacks without injury, leading Schildkraut and Elsass (2016, p. 27) to suggest that victims should be considered in a more abstract sense. In support of Schildkraut and Elsass' suggestion, this research argues that definitions should focus less on the mass element, in terms of the number of fatalities, and instead consider the intent. In arming themselves with a firearm and indiscriminately shooting people the lethal intent is clear. The intention is to commit homicide, that the fatality count is lower is not a result of the perpetrator carefully selecting victims. Therefore, this research moves to consider all victims and not just fatalities.

2.1.5 Duration, Location and Type of Event - Public/Private Space

In addition to debates regarding the fatality threshold, there is also a lack of clarity in relation to the duration, location and 'type' of mass shooting. PMS may occur across multiple geographical areas or crime scenes, but they are usually restricted to a particular place, for example a school. According to Dietz (1986), in order for it to be considered a mass shooting rather than a serial murder, or sensational homicide, it must be one continuous event, with no 'cooling off' period (Aitken *et al.*, 2008). Fox and Levin (2003; 2015) also discuss a single event, although

suggest the duration can extend from a few minutes to several hours. This is similar to Reuter and Mouzos' (2003) assertion that it must occur within a few hours to be a PMS, and Duquet (2015, p.5), also referring to a short period of time. Both Hungerford and Cumbria (discussed in Chapter 4) are examples of how PMS can span both time and place, originating in one location yet moving onto others, over a brief period of time. The Hungerford incident began in Savernake Forest, seven miles west of Hungerford village, where it ended. Whilst the Cumbria shooting took place over three hours, in various locations within a 45-mile radius around Cumbria.

PMS in schools, universities and college campuses tend to overshadow those that take place in other locations; even those where a number of individuals are killed frequently receive very little attention, comparatively, as the media (Schildkraut, Elsass and Meredith, 2017), often focus on school shootings. Although associated with the USA (Böckler *et al.*, 2013, p. 9) school shootings have occurred in the UK, Finland, Germany (discussed in Chapter 4), Canada, Japan and Yemen (Aitken *et al.*, 2008, p. 265). School shootings are similar to other PMS, in that they are considered planned acts of mass violence. Nurmi (2014a) suggests that school shootings are placed in two categories, targeted and rampage. Targeted shootings are intended to intimidate a particular population (Schildkraut and Elsass, 2016, p. 19); whilst rampage shootings emphasise the random selection of the victims (Nurmi, 2014a, p.8). Revenge shootings that target predetermined victims are ruled out, both in this and Nurmi's research, as are terrorist/ideologically/politically motivated shootings.

School shootings are typically perpetrated by students that currently, formerly or recently attended the school (Nurmi, 2014a, p. 8, Schildkraut and Elsass, 2016, p. 20), examples would be Erfurt and Winnenden in Germany and Jokela and Kauhajoki in Finland. Dunblane however would be an exception to this, whilst it was a school shooting, it does not fit into definitions of school shootings frequently used by researchers (Newman *et al.*, 2004; Muschert, 2007; Langman, 2009). The perpetrator was a middle-aged man, who was neither a current, recent or former pupil. This demonstrates how not all PMS events 'are easily categorised into

carefully constructed parameters of a particular type of event' (Schildkraut and Elsass, 2016, p. 20).

The aforementioned comments highlight why expanding and clarifying definitions would unite episodic violent crime events (Schildkraut and Elsass, 2016, p. 26), and lead to a more complete picture of the issue. Fatality thresholds, and/or geographical locations often dictate which shootings are categorised as mass, and both factors undoubtedly have an impact on the perceived severity of the event, and as such the firearm control debate. Another important factor in PMS, is the victim status.

2.1.6 Victim Status

In terms of newsworthiness and how PMS are responded to, the age of the victim is of particular significance and can have an impact on legislative responses. PMS where the victims are children, are more likely to result in calls for stricter firearms control measures to prevent such tragedies (Zhang *et al.*, 2019). Although in the USA, Sandy Hook PMS was considered justification for increasing firearms ownership. Subsequent narratives focused on providing more people with firearms to protect themselves and limit the opportunity for PMS (discussed in Chapters 6 & 7), amid proposals suggesting that arming teachers will prevent mass shootings (Smith, 2018).

PMS often stand out due to them being seemingly premeditated attacks on random, innocent victims (Newman *et al.*, 2004), notably, those instances where young children have been targeted, such as Dunblane and Antwerp. Mass shootings on school grounds account for a relatively small percentage of victims, yet they capture more public attention than other shootings (Wong, 2019). Women and children are also disproportionately represented in PMS (75%) compared to other types of firearm violence (Gonzalez-Guarda *et al.*, 2018), for example, Winnenden, where all the victims were female except one (Duquet, 2016). This is unsurprising given that some perpetrators intend to 'go out in a blaze of glory' (Mullen, 2004). Perpetrators of PMS are often focused on attracting attention in an attempt to gain notoriety, this could explain why despite their innocence children are sometimes targeted, as violent incidents with children and women are often

considered more newsworthy (Chibnall, 2010; Jewkes, 2014; Greer, 2017; Schildkraut, Elsass and Meredith, 2017). Although others suggest mass shooters demonstrate an apparently irresistible urge to unleash lethal violence, more or less randomly (Beres, 2017), and instead the victim selection is far more random and indiscriminate (Lott and Landes, 1996; Knoll, 2010; Bjelopera, 2013; Studdert *et al.*, 2017).

2.1.7 Summary

Throughout this chapter relevant literature has been reviewed, highlighting the lack of consensus surrounding how PMS are defined and classified. Cases that cause the least amount of death and destruction are likely to generate the least amount of media attention and are subsequently most likely to be missed in data collection, thus rendering them least noteworthy (Kelly, 2012; Lankford, 2015), least important in terms of lethality and social and political consequence. There are PMS with high fatality thresholds that result in policy change, and some that result in change despite a low fatality threshold (see Chapter 4 for a full discussion). Similarly, there are instances of PMS that occurred in schools that resulted in amendments to legislation, and others that did not. It is clear to see that some events appear to be more ‘deserving’ of attention yet never receive it, leading Kingdon (1984, p. 15) to ask; ‘What makes people in and around government attend at any given time, to some subjects and not to others?’. It is not always clear which factors result in policy change, or why decision-makers pay attention to one thing rather than another (Kingdon, 2011, p. 1).

The aim of this research is to uncover why certain PMS result in policy changes when others do not. It is important to understand how and why particular sets of problems come to the attention of those in and around government. To assist with this part of the research, Kingdon’s (1984) MSF will be used to analyse the case studies. In an attempt to establish what factors resulted in legislative change, Kingdon (1984) proposed three categories of independent and interdependent variables that interact to produce ‘windows of opportunity’ for agenda setting (discussed in Section 2.2 below). The three process ‘streams’; problems, policies and politics, while largely independent of one another are joined together at some critical juncture, and out of this coupling of the streams the greatest policy changes

occur (Kingdon, 1984, p. 20). Kingdon's MSF and its relevance for this research will now be discussed.

2.2 Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework Introduction

The academic field of policy analysis has grown increasingly complex in recent years. Beginning with the apparently simple task of seeking to explain how and why policies change, an early model saw the policy process as a 'black box' into which a set of inputs were fed, providing 'policy outcomes' from the other side (Cerna, 2013). Policy analysts sought to establish which interests prevailed and why and how reform agendas may be instrumentally shaped by powerful actors. Now the policy analysis field incorporates a wide range of approaches that reach beyond instrumentality to explore both the opportunities and constraints encountered by those seeking to solve social problems, and the cultural and ideological context in which ideas thrive or die (Cairney, 2019b). One of the central questions facing policy analysts is why certain ideas gain popular support and become part of a process of change, while other equally compelling ideas eventually fall by the wayside, only to be taken up again when the political environment is favourable (Swinkels, 2020). Is it the context in which they arise, the support they receive, or how they then move through the institutional process? Kingdon's (1984) MSF is one of the most influential recent attempts to answer such questions.

It is not just that ideas or issues arise on the political agenda, it is how they are constructed or interpreted (Birkland, 2007, p. 26). The origin of policy change varies from one case to the next, and often a combination of factors are required to bring an idea to policy fruition (Kingdon, 1984, p. 81). However, it is not where the idea came from, but what made it take hold and grow that is key to understanding policy change (Kingdon, 1984, p. 76). During his exploration of public policymaking, and why some proposals were prominent whilst others that deserve attention never received it, Kingdon (1984) adapted Cohen, March and Olsen's (1972) Garbage Can Model (GCM) of policymaking within organisations, the GCM describes where problems, solutions and choices are 'dumped' (Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016). Kingdon focused on the US political system presenting a streams metaphor which is not only flexible but simple to apply (Cairney and

Jones, 2016, p. 39). There are many theories of policy analysis, however MSF continues to be a key reference point in public policy literature (Béland and Howlett, 2016; Cairney and Jones, 2016; De Wals, Espinoza-Moya and Béland, 2019). It provides a methodological tool to guide research, giving an unparalleled flexibility that requires no complex codebook to test hypotheses (Cairney and Jones, 2016, p. 37-38). The focus of the MSF on agenda setting and policy entrepreneurs (discussed in Section 2.2.8), and how the three independent streams join together is of particular relevance for this research, it is for this reason the MSF was considered the most appropriate framework for both the case study analysis, and the interviews.

The development of public policy according to Kingdon (1984), is a set of processes or steps that includes the identification of key issues (agenda setting); considering options for action (alternative specification); decision making through official channels, such as voting (authoritative choice) and carrying out the chosen course of action (decision implementation). The MSF requires three separate categories or process 'streams' to come together at the same time, during a brief 'window of opportunity' for agenda setting (Kingdon, 1984). When a policy window opens, and it is perceived as an opportunity to push a cause, the likelihood for policy change increases (Kingdon, 1984; Hurka, 2017). In order to ascertain which issues, problems and solutions are likely to gain the attention of decision-makers and the public, and thus most likely to receive the broadest attention, the definition of alternatives, problems and solutions is crucial (Birkland, 2007, p. 63).

This chapter will consider the processes that are adopted by groups either to elevate issues on the agenda or are sought to deny the opportunity of other groups to place issues. A discussion relating to agenda setting, alternatives and solutions will be considered before exploring the three streams, problems, policies and politics and concluding with a discussion around policy windows and entrepreneurs.

2.2.1 Agenda Setting

Prior to discussing agenda setting it is first necessary to clarify what the term agenda means in this context. Kingdon (1984, p. 3) sees the agenda as a list of

problems or subjects that government officials, and those closely associated with those officials outside of government, are paying attention to at any given time. Building on this, Birkland (2007) suggests it is not just a collection of problems requiring action, it is also an understanding of the other elements of public problems, causes, symbols and solutions that come to the attention of both the public and government officials. Agendas not only contain lists of Acts that may be presented for consideration, they can also include 'a series of beliefs about the existence and magnitude of problems' and what should be done to address them, either by those in and around government, those in the private sector, not for profit organisations or a combination of action by some or all of the above (Birkland, 2007, p. 63).

There are agendas at all levels throughout government, every body of government, every community has a collection of issues that are available to be debated or are actively being considered (Birkland, 2007, p. 63). It is therefore possible and necessary to categorise the issues based upon how likely it is that a decision will be enacted, implemented or rejected. According to Birkland (2007) the agenda is organised in four levels; the agenda universe, the largest level and where all potential issues and ideas sit; the systemic agenda on the other hand includes all issues that are perceived as meriting attention by the political community and are within the 'legitimate jurisdiction of existing governmental authority' (Cobb and Elder, 1983, p. 85) although they remain some way from enactment. Whilst the institutional agenda contains those items requiring serious consideration by the authoritative decision-makers (Cobb and Elder, 1983, p. 85). Finally, the decision agenda items are those that have progressed through the agenda levels to ultimately be acted upon (Birkland, 2007, p. 65). Issues are advanced from the agenda universe, to systematic, institutional and decision agenda by different groups who seek to influence the agenda (Coombes, 2020). Although it is not solely that issues reach the agenda, rather it is how these issues are constructed or interpreted that results in competition for attention (Birkland, 2007, p. 63).

The process whereby problems and the selection of alternative solutions either receive or lose the attention of those in government is, according to Birkland

(2007), agenda setting. Those wishing to establish their issues' place in what is often limited agenda space find themselves having to fight to earn that place (Birkland, 2006). As there is just not the capacity for all possible alternatives to address all possible problems that may arise at any given point in time there is considerable competition to set the agenda (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988). Just as some groups fight to maintain prominence of their problem on the agenda, there are those that also fight to ensure other issues are kept off the agenda. Coombes (2020, p. 9) considers agenda setting to be both the beginning and the end of the policy process. The process begins with questions that address how certain issues find a place on the agenda whilst other languish, why is attention paid to one thing yet not another, and who is responsible for setting the policy agenda (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009). However, should issues not end up on the agenda, or fail to receive full attention, then the process will end (Kingdon, 1984).

One influence or contributor to agenda setting is a prominent event, crisis or focusing event that signals the emergence of a problem (Kingdon 1984, p. 17; Knaggård, 2013). Focusing events, such as PMS, are notably dramatic, often with vivid imagery and tangible victims. As a result, such events tend to feature prominently in the media as they align with journalistic values around newsworthiness (Birkland, 2013; Jewkes, 2014). In such cases, the surge in attention to the public problem leads to increased negative attention, and this can have an impact on the position of the issue on the agenda (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009).

Focusing events can influence agenda setting in three ways. Firstly, if there is a pre-existing perception of a problem, focusing events can act to reinforce them and focus attention on a problem that was already present in people's minds (Kingdon, 1984, p. 103). Secondly, they can serve as an early warning, again calling attention to something that could or should be considered a problem, although this requires other indicators that there is a widespread problem that is a concern (Kingdon, 1984, p. 104). Thirdly, they can have an impact on problem definition when in combination with other similar events (Kingdon, 1984, p. 104). If one PMS is not considered sufficient to create the impression there is a problem, it is understandable that several occurring in quick succession might be, as was the

case in Finland (discussed in Chapter 4). Knowledge accumulation and specialists generating policy proposals is the second contributor. Thirdly, it is how political processes affect the agenda. According to Kingdon (1984, p. 19) this refers to shifts in national mood and vagaries of public opinion.

Various complex factors play a role in bringing attention to a problem, and trying to identify a root cause is often futile (Kingdon, 1984, p. 9). The concept of the MSF is a flexible metaphor that can help put agenda setting mechanism into practice as discussed by Cairney and Zahariadis (2016). Similar to Kingdon's work, this research seeks to understand why some problems, in this case PMS, gain visibility on the policy agenda and overshadow others that deserve attention yet never receive it. This simple and flexible approach can be applied to almost any time, place or policy (Cairney and Jones, 2016, p. 40) and will be used to explore why certain PMS result in policy changes and importantly, why some do not. The MSF will be used in an attempt to explore what makes those in and around government attend to some problems and not to others (Kingdon, 1984).

2.2.2 Alternatives and Solutions

Policymakers have to pay attention to an agenda problem and identify relevant and feasible policy solutions as alternatives, in order to produce major policy change (Bardach, 2012). According to Schattschneider (1960, p. 66 cited in Birkland, 2007, p. 63) 'the definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power'. Alternative design and identification are an essential part of agenda setting and the process of making decisions, although it is an area that has received much less attention (Ferretti, Pluchinotta, and Tsoukiàs, 2019). There may be high priority placed on a focusing event, although they are not always straightforward, and can be subject to the personal experiences of policymakers (Kingdon, 1984, p. 101). PMS, according to Birkland (1997) are one example of a focusing event or external shock that can indicate the existence of a problem (Birkland, 1997). If certain events highlight the need for reform, then policy change becomes more likely, particularly when policy entrepreneurs appear to have a solution ready for the problem (Cairney, 2018a, p. 204). Policy entrepreneurs willing to push their proposals can be responsible for prompting important people to pay attention (Crow, 2010, p. 300; Knaggård, 2015, p. 451). However, the

definition of a problem is only one piece of the puzzle, an essential yet insufficient condition for significant policy alterations to occur (Cairney, 2018a).

The gradual accumulation of different viewpoints and knowledge over time, can also contribute to agenda setting and alternatives (Kingdon, 1984, p. 18, Cairney, 2019a). Ideas about feasibility and how groups are impacted by a policy influences any policies or alternatives that may arise (Sidney, 2007, p. 81). Ideas can rapidly spread among policy communities like fads, or may gradually develop through discussions (Cairney, 2018b), and the generation of alternatives requires a degree of expertise; credible proposals cannot be drafted without such attention (Kingdon, 1984, p. 74). Specialists, researchers and interest groups are the most important actors outside of government, and they are often consulted for options to help make an informed choice (Kingdon, 1984, p. 174). Interest groups can play a role in not only identifying issues but also suggesting potential solutions (Sidney, 2007).

It is when the proposals of experts and academics are directly related to problems occupying officials' attention that policymakers are most likely to listen (Kingdon, 1984, p. 59). Values relating to such issues directly affect the alternatives proposed or opposed, if there is a dominant ideology or national culture, it will affect the policy arena differently (Kingdon, 1984, p. 140). Should important interest groups possess the required resources they can not only block the passage of proposals they consider inimical to their preferences but also hinder serious discussion or consideration of those proposals (Kingdon, 1984, p. 158). Equally, the absence of viable alternatives sees policy formation come to a standstill (Howlett, McConnell and Perl, 2015, p. 422). It may also be the case that while participants recognise a problem, they were not cognisant of alternatives that could be considered as solutions (Kingdon, 1984, p. 217).

If most specialists do not reach agreement on one alternative, they at least reach some understanding on the fairly narrow set of alternatives available to choose from (Kingdon, 1984, p. 147). Where there is reluctance to take big steps a strategy that may be used to manipulate outcomes is to implement incremental changes that proceed gradually piece by piece. An old alternative that may have

previously appeared on the policy agenda but has since disappeared or been dismissed, may resurface, as seen following Hungerford (discussed in Section 4.2.2), equally changes may be small, gradual and incremental as seen following Erfurt and Winnenden (see Section 4.3.4). If agendas change incrementally, gradual increase in interest in a subject would be apparent over time, but this is not the case, rather than an incremental agenda change Kingdon (1984, p.85) states that the subject, following decades of considering the problem, suddenly 'hits, catches on, or takes off' upon receiving a sudden flurry of interest that produces a change.

Kingdon (1984, p. 4) discusses agenda setting and alternatives and how the distinction between the two is not particularly clear. This is not aided by the fact that much of the literature uses the term agenda setting to refer to both of them (Durant and Diehl, 1989; Princen, 2011), despite both being governed by different processes. In support of this, Béland and Howlett (2016) distinguish between the two processes, suggesting one is used for agenda setting and the other for decision making. Participants or processes can act as impetus or constraint, either boosting the subject higher up the agenda, or pushing an alternative into more active consideration (Kingdon, 1984, p. 206; Callaghan and Sylvester, 2019, p. 3). Experts may play a crucial role in developing alternatives, politicians however, may be more influential in agenda setting (Kingdon, 1984, p. 4). Despite their potential, political parties and election campaigns may not be particularly prominent (Hurka, 2017, p. 65), although Kingdon (1984, p. 65) notes that they can still indirectly influence policy agendas, for example, due to a change in administration, or in how agendas, alternatives and policy problems are approached. Problem recognition is critical to agenda setting, people initially recognise problems and then look for ways to address them (Birkland, 2007). Sometimes acceptance of a pressing problem can be sufficient for it to gain prominence on the policy agenda (Kingdon, 1984, p. 120).

The reception of policy solutions can be influenced by election results, public mood, pressure group campaigns and changes of administration (Kingdon, 1984, p. 19). A window may open when a solution is not available in the policy stream, moreover, not all solutions have an equal likelihood of being discussed with all

problems (Kingdon, 1984, p. 216). The fact an alternative is viable and available is not in itself sufficient for it to reach a high position on the agenda, the likelihood is that without the critical joining of the streams (discussed in full below), they are likely to quickly fade from view (Kingdon, 1984, p. 150).

2.2.3 Problems, Policies and Politics Introduction

The three major process streams, or 'families' of processes of agenda setting are the problem (recognition), policy (formation and refining of proposals) and politics (engaging in political activities) (Kingdon, 1984). The three streams operate largely independently, solutions can be developed, regardless of whether they address an existing problem. The politics stream can change even if the policy community is not prepared or if the issues have not changed (Kingdon, 1984, p. 93). However, at some critical juncture a policy window opens, providing opportunities to advance favoured proposals. Compelling problems are presented, or something occurs in the politics stream (Kingdon, 1984, p. 21; Ackrill, Kay and Zahariadis, 2013, p. 880-881), at this point, the streams then cross (Béland and Howlett, 2016, p. 222), and according to Kingdon (1984), the most significant policy changes arise from the coupling of the three streams.

Figure 2:2 Multiple Streams Flow Chart
(Source: Zahariadis, 2007)

2.2.4 Problem Stream - Problem Recognition

The problem stream relates to those items or problems that capture the attention of people within government, although only a small proportion of problems actually receive policymaker attention (Cairney and Jones, 2016, p. 40). Policymakers are unable to consider all problems and solutions at all times; this requires them to make rational choices. However, an individuals' ability to act rationally is limited by the information, time and resources available to them (Simon, 1982). Bounded rationality accounts for the cognitive limitations of decisionmakers, and the factors that influence their decision-making process and outcomes (Simon, 1990).

Policymakers often make decisions based on how a potential problem or issue has been defined or framed (Zahariadis, 2007, p. 66). Problems are often not self-evident (Kingdon, 1984, p. 99), it is first necessary to consider how problems come to the attention of people. It is not that attention relates to an objective measure of the problems' importance, instead it depends on the interests and biases of the audience and those making the decisions (Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016).

To make an item from a less visible area move up the governmental agenda, something must happen that brings it to the attention of policymakers (Kingdon, 1984, p. 100). This can be either through political pressure, or due to less systematic indicators that a problem exists, such as an event or incident that captures their attention (Kingdon, 1984, p. 95). An example would be a crisis, disaster or focusing event that pushes the problem forward, such as a PMS. Such events often stimulate concern regarding firearms ownership and misuse and demand some sort of action, to the extent that even inaction is a considered a decision (Kingdon, 1984). As seen following the PMS in Dunblane, pressure campaigns from interest groups can also bring problems to the attention of important people (Kingdon, 1984, p. 98).

Blackman and Baird (2014) argue that there is an all too familiar pattern that occurs in the wake of PMS. Introducing the Shooting Cycle, they suggest the five-stage process follows PMS (see Figure 2:3), once people become aware of the incident, and particularly the number of victims, support for firearms control surges. However, the emotional fervour for change fades and support decreases as time elapses and society returns to the status quo (Blackman and Baird, 2014, p. 1515). Charles (2015) suggests that the shooting cycle refers to the proverbial

political blame game that ensues following PMS, as discussed below. Nonetheless, integrating the Shooting Cycle with the MSF provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of PMS, policy change, and the role of public and political responses.

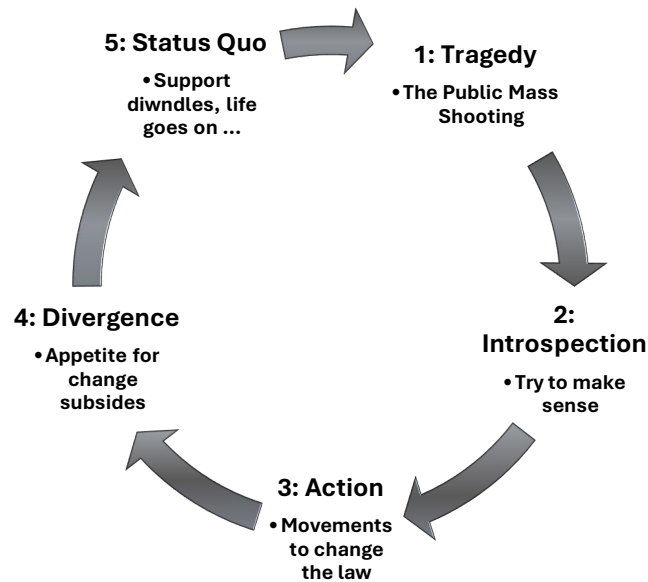


Figure 2:3 The Shooting Cycle
(Source: Blackman and Baird, 2014)

Problems do not receive attention simply because they are considered important, and policymakers do not select solutions because they are the most effective (Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016, p. 4). Once a particular problem is defined, some approaches and alternatives are favoured whilst others are not (Kingdon, 1984, p. 207). Those within policymaking are able to draw attention to some issues, using facts but also making emotional appeals (True, Jones and Baumgartner, 2007, p. 161). The presence of a problem is not sufficient in itself, even if the problem is pressing. Kingdon (1984) posits that problems are more than the external events or conditions themselves, there must also be a perceptual, interpretive element. Values significantly influence how problems are defined, and which factors are considered more or least important (Watson, 2022), and subsequently, why people define something as a problem that must be prioritised. Although this attention can shift elsewhere very quickly (Cairney and Jones, 2016, p. 40).

2.2.5 Policy - Forming and Refining of Solutions

Cairney and Zahariadis (2016) suggest there are three reasons why the policy stream, (solution production process), should be considered independent of problem solving. Primarily, because the development of solutions is frequently intended to solve a variety of problems, to ensure the work produced by public organisations is legitimate, or to assist people to get elected (Kingdon, 1984, p. 129). Secondly, whilst interest moves from issues rapidly, considerably more time is taken to develop solutions to major policy changes (Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016, p. 6). According to Kingdon (1984, p. 123, 131), policy solutions are said to be whirling around in a 'policy primeval soup' (for a full discussion see Kingdon, 1984). It is here they are proposed, reconsidered and modified by various actors and participants within a policy community. Such communities are composed of specialists in a given policy area (Kingdon, 1984, p. 123), researchers, academics and interest groups, amongst others. Some actors bring their political popularity, some their expertise, others their ability to attract attention. Furthermore, there are times when in anticipation of future problems, widely accepted solutions are developed in response to the disconnect between slow policy development and staggered attention (Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016, p. 6). The final reason explores how actors deal with this disconnect. Solutions are developed by policy entrepreneurs in search of the correct opportunity to exploit interest in a current and relevant problem (Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016, p. 6). They have a key role in shaping the course of the three streams (Béland and Howlett, 2016), both those in and outside of government can couple problems to solutions; and both to politics (Kingdon, 1984, p. 21; Ackrill, Kay and Zahariadis, 2013, p. 880). Additionally, there are a variety of ways those within interest groups or research organisations who are willing to invest their resources (time, energy, reputation and sometimes money), can promote their ideas in the hope of a future return (Kingdon, 1984, p. 151). Moreover, the involvement of multiple actors in the decision-making process is essentially acceptance that there are simultaneously many ways of understanding a problem and finding a solution (Hofer, 2022).

The policy stream generates a shortlist of proposals, which may not reflect a consensus within the policy community, but rather an agreement on a few prominent options (Kingdon, 1984, p. 151). Within policy communities some

proposals are rapidly discarded, while others receive more serious attention. Ensuring policy communities are receptive to a new idea requires a lengthy process of 'softening up', during which policy entrepreneurs promote their ideas (Kingdon, 1984, p. 151). This increases the likelihood of a problem reaching the top of the agenda when combined with an open policy window and an available solution (Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016, p. 21). Outcomes depend on the combination of problems, solutions, participants and their resources. How these elements are processed, and who is involved significantly influences the results, additionally, the readiness of solutions and problems that are on people's minds are also crucial (Kingdon, 1984; Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016).

However, the forces driving the politics stream differ from those influencing the policy stream; people may be concerned about a problem without having a solution, and political forces might bring attention to a specific issue (Kingdon, 1984, p. 150).

2.2.6 Politics - Engaging in Politics - Motive and Opportunity

Kingdon (1984, p. 152) notes that the politics stream flows along independently from both the problem and policy streams, according to its own dynamics and its own rules. In contrast to the emphasis placed on persuasion by the policy stream, in the politics stream consensus is governed by bargaining (Kingdon, 1984, p. 167). Nonetheless, the problem and politics windows are related. In addition to paying attention to a problem, policymakers also have to be receptive to solutions that are proposed (Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016, p. 5). This can involve the policymaker considering and modifying their own beliefs in response to any perceived changes in the national mood, or perhaps due to feedback from political parties and interest groups (Cairney and Jones, 2016, p. 40; Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016, p. 7).

The politics stream is essentially about who is willing to politically support a given proposal or who will oppose it (DeLeo, Zohlnhöfer and Zahariadis, 2016, p. 18). According to many (Kingdon, 1984; DeLeo, Zohlnhöfer and Zahariadis, 2016, p. 19; Herweg and Zohlnhöfer, 2019, p. 3; Hoefer, 2022), the politics stream contains three major components; swings in national mood; changes in the balance of

organised forces or interest groups on all sides; and changes in the administration or elected officials active in the decision-making. However, for the purpose of this research, the aforementioned terms will be used interchangeably with the following: political climate and context; key political actors and their influence; and the impact of political factors on policymaking

The national mood has important policy consequences, changes within the national mood can affect policy agendas and outcomes (Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016). In addition to swings, or perceived changes, in the national mood and the balance of organised political forces, the third major component of the political stream is composed of events within government (Kingdon, 1984, p. 160). Administrations change, and in doing so they bring with them changes in policy agendas. Changes in the national mood can affect election results, how receptive those in government tasked with making decisions are, and also interest groups (Kingdon, 1984, p. 56). Such changes in national mood can be sufficient to overcome opposition, and to define the political stream as leaning toward change (Kingdon, 1984, p. 160). However, frequently a balance of organised forces can mitigate against change (Kingdon, 1984, p. 158).

Equally, changes in government administration can pose significant barriers, either because policymakers hold existing views on policies or because established policy communities resist initiatives put forward by less experienced advocates (Kingdon, 1984, p. 159; Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016, p. 7). Support for an issue or problem allows it to be pushed, and on occasion could be solely responsible for its rise to agenda prominence (Kingdon, 1984, p. 157). Proposals that are not in line with the values of specialists are less likely to survive or succeed than those that are (Kingdon, 1984, p. 140).

In the politics stream, swings in the national mood are dismissed as a category by Zahariadis (2015a), who considered swings in national mood empirically elusive. Instead, suggesting a variable party politics section, as it is not necessary for all three elements to point in the same direction (Herweg, Zahariadis and Zohlnhöfer, 2018). This was apparent following Dunblane, and Hungerford to a lesser extent,

when the government perceived a shift in public sentiment regarding firearms that galvanised political action and overcame potential resistance from interest groups.

The three streams develop and operate largely independently of one another until a window of opportunity opens, during which time attention is given to a problem, for which a solution exists and at a time when those responsible for policymaking have the motive and opportunity to select it (Kingdon, 1984; Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016, p. 1). Solutions are joined to problems, and both are joined to favourable political forces. It is the coupling of these three separate streams at critical junctures that produces the greatest agenda change (Kingdon, 1984, p. 92). Individually, none of the streams are sufficient to place an item firmly on the decision agenda, although the agenda is affected more by the problem and politics streams, whilst the alternatives are affected more by the policy stream (Kingdon, 1984, p. 176). An alternative floating in the policy stream becomes coupled either to a prominent problem or to events in the politics stream in order to be considered seriously (Kingdon, 1984, p. 87). If an alternative is coupled to a problem as a solution, that combination finds support in the politics stream. If an alternative is seized upon by politicians, it is justified as a solution to a real problem (Cairney, 2018b). A problem is often highlighted because a disaster or focusing event occurs, this can be recognised by signs like sustained and marked changes in public opinion and 'repeated mobilisation of people with intensely held preferences and bandwagons onto which politicians of all persuasions climb' (Kingdon, 1984, p. 206).

Several factors elevate a subject to high agenda status, if any of these elements are missing, the issues' position on the decision agenda may be temporary (Kingdon, 1984, p. 187). Additionally, strong opposition from pressure groups can move an item down the priority list or remove it from the agenda altogether (Kingdon, 1984, p. 206). There are also many potential items that do not rise on the agenda. Sometimes all the streams are developed and ready; a real perceived problem has a solution, and there is no political barrier to action, but the subject still needs a lever (Kingdon, 1984, p. 199). Each of the streams can act as impetus or constraint (Kingdon, 1984, p. 19). Items can be pushed higher up the agenda by the problem stream; it is also possible that the upward movement of others may be

hindered. As previously mentioned, it is the combination of the streams, and their individual development that is crucial for understanding policy change (Kingdon, 1984, p.188). What matters is not where the idea originated, but what allowed it to take hold and grow that is key to understanding policy change and consequently, why some policies do not change (Kingdon, 1984, p. 7).

2.2.7 Policy Windows

Policy windows open either due to changes in the politics stream, this could be either an administration change, a variation in the partisan or ideological distribution of seats or a shift in national mood. Alternatively, it may arise due to a new issue that has captured the attention of those in and around government (Kingdon, 1984, p. 176). If a pressing problem results in a policy window opening, advocates sensing the opportunity might rush to seize it. If, when this happens, the alternatives generated as solutions meet the political acceptability tests, they are likely to fare much better. Similarly, when a window is opened following a political event, participants attempt to locate a problem that they can attach a solution to (Kingdon, 1984, p. 183).

Windows can be predictable or unpredictable, however, predictable windows, such as planned legislative changes are considered more likely to result in a successful coupling of the streams, compared to unpredictable windows created by focusing events (Coombes, 2021, p. 24). Focusing events are less likely to bring about change unless they are high on the agenda (Herweg *et al.*, 2018, p. 28). According to Kingdon (1984) there are four principal types of windows: routine political windows, discretionary policy windows, spillover problem windows and random problem windows. This research focuses on random problem windows in which unpredictable windows are opened by random focusing events or in this case PMS.

Policy windows open, in either the politics or problem streams giving policy entrepreneurs an opportunity to align the three streams, a recognised problem, an available solution, and the political will for change (Coombes, 2021, p. 24). Policy windows can also close as quickly as they open, without a readily available solution or if the alternative is challenging to implement or costly or indeed the

attention, as it so often does, shifts to other priorities. The joining of the streams is a critical element of the MSF, and according to Ackrill, Kay and Zahariadis (2013, p. 880) this depends on both the nature of the policy window and 'the skills and resources of the policy entrepreneur'. Political parties, interest groups and other non-governmental actors have to plan their activities based on which issues are likely to emerge in the policy landscape.

2.2.8 Policy Entrepreneurs

Kingdon (1984) defines policy entrepreneurs as those advocates willing to invest personal and institutional resources in an attempt to alter the policy environment. A growing body of evidence highlights the critical role of policy entrepreneurs in the introduction, debate, and enactment of public policies (Callaghan and Sylvester, 2019, p. 2). They can shape the identification of policy problems, influence the debates surrounding those policies, ultimately affecting their passage and implementation (Kingdon, 1984, p. 129). Entrepreneurs operate both inside and outside of government in roles typically reserved for the political elite, working to advance public policy toward their preferred status quo (Callaghan and Sylvester, 2019, p. 2). Policy entrepreneurs have held roles as politicians and bureaucrats within government, while outside of government they have been identified as lobbyists, academics, policy analysts and representatives of nonprofit organisations (Kingdon, 1984; Roberts and King, 1991; Meijerink and Huitema, 2010; Callaghan and Sylvester, 2019). If private citizens act as policy entrepreneurs, the process of policy change becomes accessible to a broader range of actors, rather than being confined to elite individuals within government (Callaghan and Sylvester, 2019, p. 14).

Some policy entrepreneurs find themselves in a better position to be able to capitalise on the opportunities that are presented by policy windows (Hristakopoulos, 2013, p. 26). Firstly, not all have access to the attention of policymakers, ranging from an individual writing a letter, to the Prime Minister. Some entrepreneurs have finite resources both in terms of finances but also time and manpower they are able to expend (Hristakopoulos, 2013, p. 26). Policy entrepreneurs will then seek to exploit the event and the resulting window of opportunity by publicly advancing their cause and proposing solutions (Kingdon,

1984). The Snowdrop Campaign serves as a notable example of such movements, discussed in full in Chapter 4.

2.2.9 Strengths and Limitations

The application of the MSF to firearm policy processes can offer important insights into how firearms control is politically processed within the four countries chosen for this research. Selected for its flexibility and value in establishing how policies develop and moreover, what causal factors might help to explain such developments (Sanjurjo, 2020).

A criticism of the MSF and Kingdon's work is that it is based within the USA and focuses on agenda setting as a distinct aspect of policymaking; that and as a single framework emerging from the GCM, it does not attempt to connect with other theories or frameworks (Coombes, 2021, p. 29). More recently, Jones *et al.* (2016, p. 13) discuss how the MSF is used in many ways although similarly to Kingdon's, many studies fail to include all five main structural elements as discussed above. Indeed, Cairney and Jones (2015, p. 2) and Zahariadis (2015b) argue how the only way that the MSF can make a meaningful contribution theoretically is when applied in a non-trivial way, meaning that attention must be given to all elements of the framework. The MSF is a useful model for understanding why certain issues make it onto the agenda, although requires a better understanding of the roles of local agencies and policy entrepreneurs (Coombes, 2021, p. 34). Although there still remains very little research that has explored agenda setting outside of the USA (Coombes, 2021). Cairney and Zahariadis, (2016, p. 88) outline three main elements that enhance the transferability of the MSF, which are not specific to any one political system, they are 'ambiguity and competition for attention, an imperfect selection process, and limited time'.

The MSF is particularly useful when extended to explore decision-making processes more broadly (Howlett, McConnell and Perl, 2015; Zahariadis, 2015a) and when all elements are taken together rather than individually. One of MSF's strengths is its flexibility and usefulness in explaining agenda setting across different political contexts (Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016, p. 88). Many studies that

have adopted Kingdon's model examine documentary evidence over time to establish how those issues reach the agenda. Since agendas are relatively stable, and change occurs infrequently, there is need to look back at change (Coombes, 2021, p. 33). As discussed earlier, changes in the policy stream are often incremental, while the politics and problem streams are susceptible to sudden change, indeed policy agendas continue to remain relatively stable until a crisis or focusing event occurs (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009). The potential for change following a focusing event is an area that has been largely overlooked by agenda setting theory, instead it is often described merely as a trigger that increases attention on a specific issue (Birkland, 1997). Instability and the potential to generate policy change can be caused by a crisis or focusing event, as a result, issues can rise rapidly to the top of the agenda, although the extent to which these issues result in actual change is dependent on a range of other factors (Zahariadis, 2015b). Examining focusing events can offer the opportunity to understand agenda setting, and how policy priorities are influenced and by what at a given point in time, which is crucial for this research.

2.2.10 Summary

This chapter has provided an understanding of the MSF, illustrating the practical utility of the framework in identifying and analysing significant events. It allows researchers to discern which events matter under what circumstances, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between events and their outcomes and why attention is paid to one subject and not another (Kingdon, 1984). It has considered how the three streams converge and in doing so can push items higher up the agenda or retard the upward movement of others. When attention is given to all five MSF structural elements, and the role of policy windows and entrepreneurs are taken together with the three streams, it allows for a more meaningful contribution. The following chapter will explore the methodological considerations of this research.

Chapter 3 : Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

This exploratory research examined policy change dynamics following public mass shootings (PMS) using critical realism (CR) as a framework. CR's emphasis on uncovering causal mechanisms (O'Mahoney, 2016) and its advocacy for mixed methods research provides a comprehensive approach to understanding complex phenomena like PMS and related policy responses. This framework ensures practical policy relevance while delving into the underlying processes leading to specific outcomes (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2013, p. 855).

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the research methodology, to guide readers through the key methodological decisions and processes. Structured around nine sections, each representing a key element of the research methodology, it begins with Section 3.2, an overview of the research design, justifying the use of mixed methods. A discursive account of the epistemological and ontological framework underpinning the study can be found in Section 3.3, establishing the CR philosophical framework. The methodology is grounded in CR which allows for an interpretive understanding of social phenomena that are concept dependent (Giddens, 1979) while maintaining a focus on uncovering underlying causal mechanisms.

Section 3.4 explores the research participants, sampling strategies and design, whilst data collection methods, including Stage One - case studies and Stage Two- semi-structured interviews are discussed in Section 3.5. A flexible approach to data analysis and coding is adopted, combining inductive and deductive techniques consistent with CR principles (Fletcher, 2017, p. 2) and discussed in Section 3.6. The relevant ethical issues encountered prior to and during the research are considered in Section 3.7. Finally, Section 3.8 provides a brief exploration of the research limitations, explored in more depth in Section 8.3.

The research employed a two-stage mixed-methods approach, combining CR principles with existing theory and participant knowledge (Fletcher, 2017, p. 1). Stage One involved a deductive case study analysis of four countries using the

Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) to examine policy processes following PMS. Stage Two comprised qualitative semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders from law enforcement, the policy community, interest groups and victims of PMS. This approach allowed for both deductive application of the MSF and the inductive emergence of themes from the interview data. The combination of methods provided a comprehensive understanding of PMS policy responses, balancing theoretical frameworks with stakeholder perspectives. This mixed-methods design aligns with CR epistemology, enabling a nuanced exploration of complex social phenomenon and policy processes.

The epistemological and ontological assumptions that underpin the thesis and assisted in the exploration of the research questions and aim are discussed in full below, following a discussion outlining the research design.

3.2 Research Design and Strategy

Holsti (1969, p. 27) suggests that a good research design must incorporate theory, data gathering, analysis and interpretation. The research process is often referred to in stages; data collection, data analysis, and then writing up the findings; this is a rather linear and according to Butler-Kisber (2010, p. 30), false depiction of what is a complex and iterative process. To adapt to 21st century criminological problems the approaches to the study of crime have changed, with integrated theories of crime emerging and combining theoretical percepts that were previously considered mutually exclusive and with somewhat antiquated methodological frameworks (Trahan and Stewart, 2013, p. 59).

To facilitate an understanding of the complex issue of PMS and what leads to certain kinds of changes (Pinker, 2011, p. 820), but importantly why change does not happen, the research adopted a mixed methods approach. Multiple sources of data but also multiple approaches to collecting and analysing the data, or methodological triangulation, can capture the complexity of various aspects of the phenomenon being studied (Denzin, 1973, p. 301; Greene *et al.*, 1989; Mason, 2006) in pursuit of contextual depth (Kelliher, 2005, p.1 29). The use of mixed methods and data sources allows researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 1999; Carter *et al.*,

2014), enabling researchers to combine breadth and depth in empirical enquiries to enhance the validity of research findings (Kamal, 2003). The methods selected for this research were chosen to enhance the credibility of the study (Salkind, 2010).

Higher quality work is produced when a range of approaches and methods have been considered, and choices are made according to the aims and the context of the research (Morse *et al.*, 2001). A study can address more than one research question, yet all the questions focus on the same phenomena and cover alternative characteristics of the same layered reality (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2013, p. 866). Using more than one method of data collection and/or analysis is a well-established tradition in the social sciences (Alexandra *et al.*, 2008), indeed Bryman (2006) argues that mixed methods have become a third way in social research, in addition to the often-critiqued dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative paradigms (Mason, 2006).

Combining methods results in complementary strengths and is the fundamental principle of mixed methods research (Johnson and Turner, 2003). Quantitative summaries and variables alone are unable to uncover evidence on those causal mechanisms that generate the events under observation, and for that reason quantitative methods with CR are largely viewed as descriptive (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2013, p. 862). Qualitative research designs often allow greater (theoretically informed) flexibility than quantitative research designs (Silverman, 2014, p. 65). Qualitative data is important, but our understanding is not confined to personal experience, it flows from news reports, television coverage, movies and political campaigns (Girling, Loader and Sparks, 2000, p. 5). Equally important in research is being able to measure the number of objects that belong to a class, in this case PMS and victims, whilst at the same time improving our qualitative understanding (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2013, p. 865). The way a problem is perceived and portrayed often has more implications for the political process than objective measures of event severity (Hurka, 2017). Adopting a mixed methods approach facilitated a thorough understanding of PMS and responses from multiple perspectives.

3.3 Research Philosophy: Theoretical Considerations

*“different people will come to know different things in different ways”
(Stutchbury, 2022)*

Paradigms, as described by Kuhn (1970), are broad and radically different frameworks for viewing the social world, encompassing ontology (what is real), epistemology (what we know), methodology and methods (Scotland, 2012). These foundational beliefs shape our approach to investigating the world and are crucial in determining research questions and methodologies (Cooper, 2008; Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2013, p. 856). The questions we ask and how we study the world depends on how the social world is conceptualised (Cooper, 2008, p. 8). This section outlines my position within current methodological discussions and provides an overview of the research conducted, focusing on the CR approach and its guiding epistemological principles. It demonstrates how CR informs the study’s conceptualisation of the social world and its approach to knowledge generation in the context of PMS and policy responses.

CR was chosen for its focus on complex causality and deeper understanding of social phenomena (Bockett, 2012, p. 126). Often seen as a middle way between positivism and interpretivism, emerging in response to the limitations and perceived shortcoming of both, thereby inventing a more nuanced version of realist ontology (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett 2010, p. 6). CR combines explanation and interpretation, critically examining social arrangements without accepting the existing paradigm’s assumptions at face value (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2013, p.856). It provides an alternative to both scientific positivism and purely interpretive approaches, allowing for causal explanations while acknowledging the importance of interpretation in social research (Archer *et al.*, 2016). Put simply, CR combines a realist ontology ‘there is something to find out about’ with a realistic epistemology ‘we can find out about it’. As expressed by Stutchbury (2022) in the epigraph, people are distinct and their knowledge, experience and perspectives can vary based on their unique backgrounds and how they acquire their knowledge, experiences and perspectives. There are two main conclusions of CR, research should look for causal tendencies as opposed to

universal laws or only stories, and social science must consider both agency and structure (Fryer, 2020).

CR offers a compelling account of reality (ontology) and knowledge claims about it (epistemology) according to Sorrell (2018). CR distinguishes between epistemology and ontology, emphasising the latter's relative autonomy (Archer *et al.*, 2016). It supports the idea of a reality that exists independently of our knowledge or perception of it (Bhaskar, 1989), separating the real from the observable world, with the former existing beyond observation and independent of human perceptions (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2010). CR maintains that ontology, what is real, is not reducible to epistemology, our knowledge of reality, and it is necessary to separate epistemology (knowledge, systems, thoughts, ideas, theories, language) from ontology (being, things, antics, existents, reality, objects of investigation) (Archer *et al.*, 2016). Notably, CR is epistemologically inclusive, embracing diverse perspectives and approaches (Bhaskar, Danermark and Price *et al.*, 2018)

Social science according to CR can refine and improve knowledge about the real world over time, meaning it can make claims about reality that are relatively justified, whilst continuing to be historical, contingent and changing (Archer *et al.*, 2016). CR maintains that people operate within the constraints of the real physical and social world and to succeed in their goals, they must acknowledge this reality (Taylor, 2008, p.219). Critical realists consider the real world that everyone interprets differently (Archer *et al.*, 2016) and recognise that the world exists and influences our attempts to describe it (Olsen, 2007). There is a reality independent of our thoughts and feelings; objects exist independently of our descriptions, our knowledge of them is mediated by the concepts and theories we use to describe them (Bhaskar, 1978).

Central to CR are three realms of reality: the domain of the real, the actual, and the empirical. These realms aim to highlight how three concepts; experiences, events, and causal mechanisms (see Figure 3:1 below), are integral parts of reality (Bhaskar, 2008). However, Fryer and Navarrete (2022) are critical of Bhaskar's three domains, suggesting instead that rather than helping to understand the

relationship between the concepts, they are unnecessary, confusing and moreover, there is no evidence that they exist. In their view, all three concepts are part of reality, and knowledge of the difference between experiences, events and causal mechanisms is sufficient for understanding what our data is and what we should be aiming to do, and as such negates the need for complex overlapping domains of reality (Fryer and Navarrete, 2022).

Figure 3:1 Concepts of Reality
(Adapted from Fryer and Navarrete, 2022)

Aligning my research with the concepts of experiences, events, and causal mechanisms, I have a more focused and coherent approach that integrates realist principles into my analysis of PMS and political change. There is more than one means of approaching the truth about the world (Mingers, 2000; Wynn and Williams, 2012; Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2013). Mixed methods focus on the pragmatic value of qualitative and quantitative research and CR endorses a variety of research methods. From a CR perspective it is helpful to employ quantitative measures to quantify certain characteristics (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2013, p. 862). Statistical descriptions are helpful simplifications that help to quantitatively measure objects that belong to some class or statement of common properties of objects (Sayer, 1992, p. 100). They may suggest a necessary relationship or even correlation, but do not say anything about the causal status of the relationships (if any), meaning they are descriptive summaries rather than predictive tools (Sayer, 1992). The legitimacy of quantitative methods within CR lies more in the interpretation of statistics (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2013, p. 863).

The purpose of this exploratory research is to make sense of PMS and responses to them. Seeking to counter idealist arguments that crimes have no ontological reality, in other words are socially constructed as per labelling theory, whilst trying to produce results that will have practical policy relevance. The research fits with a CR aim to combine both objectivity (reality) with subjectivity, illustrating the importance of combining facts with interpretation. I am trying to make sense of PMS, which are objectively real (part of objective reality - they occur) and cause immense harm, and how they are perceived, framed and responded to (e.g. policy narratives), which involves subjective interpretation, although any resulting policy outcome, change in regulatory structure creates objective changes. CR is a useful philosophical framework for social scientists (Fletcher, 2017). CR's search for causation helps researchers explain events and suggest practical policy recommendations to address social problems (Fletcher, 2017). To uncover the factors that lead to legislative change following PMS the research adopted a CR approach that differs to those approaches that may be concerned with statistical correlations and pure descriptions. It is instead concerned with 'why' change occurs and attempts to identify the causal dynamics that produces the outcomes (Matthews and Ross, 2010, p.140).

As a guiding philosophy, CR aligns seamlessly with both ontological and epistemological considerations. Ontologically, CR facilitates an exploration of the underlying structures that shape the relationships between PMS and policy change, this complements my research focus. Epistemologically, the application of the MSF is supported by CR, this provided a robust foundation to study these complex relationships. The methodological approach incorporates case studies and qualitative semi-structured interviews. Exploring the participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations helped to enhance the findings and analysis of the case studies whilst contributing to a nuanced understanding of the complex social dynamics of PMS and policy change.

3.4 Sampling Design and Strategies Introduction

A non-probability sampling approach was utilised for both Stage One and Two of the research, and in each case, samples were selected purposively based on certain characteristics, outlined briefly below but discussed in full in Section 3.5.

An exploration of the sampling methods selected for the qualitative interviews, will be discussed later in this chapter, whilst this section will begin with a brief discussion relating to the case studies and the selection of sources that were chosen for inclusion within Stage One of the research.

3.4.1 Stage One Case Studies

Stage One involved an analysis of publicly available information relating to single perpetrator PMS that took place in public/semi-public places across Europe from 1987- 2016. The countries selected for inclusion, the case studies, are discussed in full in Section 3.5.1 and Chapter 4. Due to the size of Europe *a priori* decision was made to concentrate on a selective number of European countries with examples of both catalytic and static PMS (discussed in Section 4.1.1). Ten countries were originally selected across the four divisions of Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western Europe, this captured 35 PMS. However, the countries were selected with very little consideration of an appropriate methodological or theoretical framework to justify their inclusion, outside of their location and experiencing PMS. The decision was made to reduce the number of incidents, to enable a full and critical discussion, whilst still allowing enough time to conduct the qualitative element of the research.

The Hungerford case was considered a key incident in the historical context of legislative change in response to PMS, thereby narrowing the time period was not an option. Government ideology influences policy change likelihood, necessitating a criminological reassessment that emphasises politico-economic structures, over cultural, moral or regulatory process (Hall and McLean, 2009, p. 333). Cavadino and Dignan's typology, building on Esping-Andersen's welfare regime, links imprisonment trends and penal policy differences with political economy systems (Tonry, 2009).

The case studies were organised using Cavadino and Dignan's typology, narrowing down the selection from 10 countries to four (35 to 18 PMS), representing distinct regime types; Neo-liberal (NL) - Great Britain, Conservative Corporatism (CC) - Germany and Belgium, and Social Democratic Corporatism (SDC) – Finland, discussed in full in Chapter 4. This framework considers how

cultural, material, and ideological factors shape penal policy and responses to crime, including PMS, allowing analysis of different political and economic structures' influence on the perpetration and subsequent policy responses.

Whilst the typology offered a means to articulate, conceptualise and distinguish between types of societies in relation to policy objectives and instruments, evidence of the observable qualitative differences between cultures is required (Squires, 2015). Kingdon's MSF was used as a method to organise the discussion of the PMS, but additionally it enabled an exploration of the causal mechanisms and an analysis of the policymaking and legislative responses. Using the MSF allowed me to analyse the countries in the context of the PMS, and the qualitative interview data complemented the analysis whilst providing empirical support of their cultural distinctions, thus contributing to an understanding of what factors lead to political change (or not) in each of the case studies.

A variety of sources, academic and grey literature, including but not limited to; government reports, plenary debates, news reports, academic articles and publicly available documentary information were selected and analysed. The sampling method was selected based on the nature of the data to be collected. As an exploratory research design seeking to gather qualitative data, non-probability sampling was considered the most appropriate approach (Matthews and Ross, 2010) and utilised a purposive sampling method. The countries were purposely selected for inclusion based on the criteria outlined in Chapter 4, and incidents were included that met the above inclusion criteria. Other incidents are also discussed, including the Plymouth shooting, and the rationale is set out in Chapter 4. A discussion relating to the sampling methods adopted for Stage Two of the research will follow.

3.4.2 Stage Two Qualitative Interviews

Pragmatic considerations played a role in the choice of sampling approach and methods. Non-probability sampling methods align with exploratory and case study research designs, but also qualitative research methods and semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2008). This section will provide an overview of the sampling approach and design selected for the qualitative semi-structured interviews.

As it is often specific to a particular context, participant and time, qualitative research has been criticised for its lack of generalisability (Thomas and Harden, 2008, p. 4). However, this study does not aim to produce a sample representative of the general population. Moreover, as suggested by Hammersley (2004) it is not always necessary to collect generalised or universal data. Small-scale research is still valuable, particularly in informing policy and practice, despite its non-generalisability, with qualitative research gaining increasing support (Davies, 1999; Newman *et al.*, 2006). Whilst such methods have been considered more advantageous than probability sampling methods, in terms of financial and time constraints (Colombo, 2008), they are not without their limitations. A major flaw of the non-probability sampling technique is that probability statements cannot be made and the range of statistical procedures as well as the subsequent inferences that can be made from the sample to the wider population is restricted (Crow and Semmens, 2008, p. 43). However, statistical models are subject to criticism for failing to consistently correspond with social reality in a significant way, undoubtedly because social life is not amenable to statistical modelling (Jupp, 2000, p. 25).

Non-probability sampling methods are useful when the goal is to study specific contexts or populations relevant to the research questions (Matthews and Ross, 2010, p. 167). This approach is particularly meaningful when exploring individuals or groups with specific knowledge regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Schutt, 2010), such as firearms, PMS and firearms legislation. By employing non-probability sampling, the research will gather insights from individuals with direct experience or expertise in these areas, enhancing the depth and relevance of the study. Given the nature of the research, random sampling was not an appropriate option. The participants were selected purposively based on the specific qualities that they possess, as advocated by Dolores and Tongco (2007). Indeed Gray *et al.* (2007) recommend that purposive sampling is selected when conducting interview-based qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews play an important role in eliciting information, although the willingness of participants to engage in a discussion is crucial for the success of the research. Aligning with the approach suggested by Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett (2013, p. 864) participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate (Matthews and

Ross, 2010), although convenience and ease of access was also a consideration. Snowball sampling was additionally adopted to complement the original sample, this involved utilising social networks of initial stakeholders to identify further participants. This technique can ensure additional participants are able to offer those distinctive characteristics shared with the original sample population (Matthews and Ross, 2010), their knowledge, expertise, and openness to participate. This section has considered the sampling design and strategies used during this study. The methods of data collection employed for the research, beginning with Stage One, the case studies will be discussed in the following section.

3.5 Methods of Data Collection Introduction

The purpose of Stage One was to conduct a comparative analysis of PMS. The philosophical foundation provided a framework for inquiry, but it was the data collection and analysis process, moreover the outcome of those processes, that were paramount (Guest, MacQueen, and Namey, 2012, p. 3). Kingdon's MSF was adopted both as a framework to organise the case studies but also to form the analysis of the PMS data, and the policy response or lack of. The justification for the inclusion of the various countries/case studies and the findings of the MSF analysis are presented in Chapter 4.

3.5.1 Stage One: The Case Studies

The need for a case study approach arose in response to the need to understand the complex social phenomena that is PMS. It was considered an appropriate methodology as the research objectives ask how and why questions (Yin, 2003), such as how are PMS understood? and why do certain PMS lead to legislative change when others do not? Case studies are often used to explain, describe and explore events or phenomena in the everyday contexts in which they occur (Yin, 2009). Adopting a collective case study involved studying multiple cases simultaneously and sequentially (Crow *et al.*, 2011), this helped to gain a broader appreciation of the PMS selected for inclusion in this research. A key part of the information was collected through reading and the preliminary analysis of relevant documentary material (Kamal, 2015, p. 29). This was further supplemented with

the qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews, as discussed in the following section.

Information was gathered in relation to each event, and this enabled a comprehensive analysis of PMS data, discussed in Chapter 5. The data collected for the case studies came from a variety of sources including but not limited to, databases that cover academic studies in political science, criminology, public health, law and sociology, unpublished and published doctoral theses, reports and papers published by organisations tasked with researching firearms crime and policy, Government, and Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), now Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) reports. Additional data sources were also identified using the bibliographies of relevant studies.

To investigate the political landscape and understand the formation of political narratives following a PMS, academic sources were supplemented with an analysis of parliamentary debates. This included Hansard reports, plenary debates, written questions, answers and statements from the UK, German, Belgian and Finnish Parliaments. When information was available in English, it was relatively straightforward to find and read, particularly when the content was automatically translated when opening documents, for example web pages. Whilst I anticipated experiencing some difficulties trying to locate and translate documents as an English speaker conducting research into countries outside of Great Britain, Google Translate proved to be very effective. Although this was not without challenges, for example, when translating a German plenary debate the translation superimposed on the original document, rendering it completely illegible. On another occasion, despite spending considerable time translating parliamentary documents, I was unable to locate any information that mentioned the Bogaarden shooting. However, in response to my enquiry an email from the Belgian Parliament quickly confirmed it was neither an access nor translation issue, rather there was no reference in parliamentary proceedings, nor in the parliamentary (draft) legislation (Verleden, 2023).

Similar challenges arose again during the investigation of the Finnish shootings. Once again, I composed an email to send to the Finnish Parliament. I received a

response from Erkkilä (2023), who acknowledged the complexity of locating and deciphering documents, even for native Finnish speakers, due to the unfamiliarity with the matters discussed and debates held in their parliament. Erkkilä (2023) also provided an extensive list of links to parliamentary matters (speeches and documents). Working methodically through the list allowed me to confirm that no mention of any PMS had been overlooked.

PMS often ignite intense debates (Böckler *et al.*, 2013). This research extends beyond exploring how events are reported, to also consider how media coverage influences public perceptions, informs policy decisions and also shapes how society reacts. To understand the relationship between the media and PMS, a variety of media sources were explored. LexisNexis, ProQuest and Global News Stream were utilised to locate news and media sources. Outside of Great Britain, additional sources were used for Belgium; Bodleian Libraries and KBR Belgica Press provided digitised newspapers, Germany; ZEFYS newspaper information system, and Finland; digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi (National Library of Finland). Additionally, to maximise the number of returns country-specific Google and Google Scholar search indexes were used, for example, Germany-Google.de or Google Scholar.de. This provided a comprehensive view of how events were depicted, particularly those instances where political parties, candidates or lobby groups were prominently featured. Searches were conducted using the following terms or phrases, either on their own or in combination with each other, for example the shooting location or perpetrator and 'firearm' for example, Hungerford AND/OR Ryan; Hungerford AND Shoot* (shoot* OR "mass shoot*" OR firearm), OR gun AND shoot "the perpetrators name" "place of shooting" "public" "shooting" "mass shooting" "public mass shooting". Each case was individually researched, although frequently material relating to other incidents was inadvertently located.

Adopting mixed methods of data collection and analysis provided a comprehensive drawing together of the PMS material, informed by my research questions and perspective. Kingdon's MSF was used to analyse each case and what factors resulted in legislative/policy change or not. Applying CR to my research helped me to identify the underlying social structures and causal mechanisms that contribute to PMS. Additionally, it assisted me to analyse the

context in which these events occurred and the broader social, cultural and political factors that shaped them. The MSF is often associated with a deductive approach (Cramer, Crane and Dewulf, 2023), therefore, deductive reasoning was used to apply the framework to the case studies. Stage One data was complemented with qualitative semi-structured interviews that explored the perspectives of key stakeholders and will be discussed in the following section.

3.5.2 Stage Two: Participant Interviews

Whilst the data in quantitative research are numeric and often very structured, those generated through qualitative orientated enquiry are less so. This is a result of a more flexible and inductive data collection process associated with qualitative research designs (Guest, Namey and Mitchell, 2013, p. 1). There are various methods for collecting and analysing qualitative data, each reflects a different theoretical, epistemological, and disciplinary perspective (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012, p. 3). Notably, the most common forms of qualitative data are generated through semi-structured interviews and are used extensively by qualitative researchers as a powerful method adopted to generate both description and interpretation of social worlds (Petty *et al.*, 2012).

Stage One data was complemented with qualitative semi-structured interviews that explored the perspectives of key stakeholders: those within the law enforcement and policy community, researchers and lobby/interest groups, gun rights and gun control organisations, with specific knowledge of the subject being studied. Two of the participants were victims of mass shootings. Participant 8 had lost their daughter during the Dunblane shooting and Participant 10 had lost their mother, sister and aunt during another shooting in Durham, although this domestic shooting was excluded from the research as it did not venture into the public domain, and the victims were not randomly selected, nonetheless it is discussed in Chapter 4 with other private/domestic shootings.

Qualitative research is extremely demanding in terms of research resources, and it would be unmanageable to conduct and analyse large numbers of interviews. The information that the study revealed is rich in detail, with the data collection producing many 'bites' of information (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003, p. 83). Consequently,

the volume of data can make analysis and interpretation time consuming (Anderson, 2010). Originally ten participants had been approached, either purposively or via snowball sampling. However, following the ESR feedback and upon reflection it occurred to me that a significant limitation of my sample was the lack of political representation. I had arranged to interview a female MP, whose area of expertise was firearms policy, unfortunately, the interview was rescheduled multiple times and then cancelled by the participant. I was however able to identify an additional participant who fulfilled the criteria and was happy to be interviewed. A total of 11 interviews were conducted, interviewees were not asked for their age or ethnicity, an overview of the participants, their gender, country, role and affiliation can be found in Table 3:1 below.

Table 3:1 Overview of Participants
(Authors own data)

Participants were 'organised' according to their role/affiliation into one of three groups (see Table 3:2 below). Group 1, those within law enforcement or politically orientated; Group 2, those who occupied roles within lobbies or interest groups, and Group 3, those who lost loved ones to a mass shooting, and were considered victims, although all participants were affected by PMS, particularly those where children were involved.

Initial inquiries about participation were made through introductory emails. Once ethical approval had been granted participants were contacted for confirmation of their willingness to participate in interviews. Mutually convenient dates, times and locations for the interviews were arranged. The requisite participant information sheet (see [appendix 1](#)) and consent form (see [appendix 2](#)) were provided prior to

the interviews, these and other ethical considerations are discussed in full in Section 3.7.

Table 3:2 Participants According to Role/Location
(Authors own data)

Similar to many qualitative studies, my research is concerned with eliciting appropriate responses from participants to answer the aim and research questions. In preparation for the interviews an interview schedule was developed (see [appendix 4](#)), it was designed to guide conversations and facilitate discussions and included open-ended questions that were closely aligned with the research objectives (Patton, 2002). The questions were drawn from relevant literature and were designed to elicit insights into the participants' perspectives on PMS and the prevailing policy responses (Bryman, 2008). Although the questions were presented in a specific order, it was on some occasions necessary to deviate from the order when additional or unforeseen questions arose. This less formal, unstructured approach enabled a more detailed exploration and prompted complex responses (Hagan, 2006) and more importantly ensured a completely open exchange (Laverty, 2003). Employing semi-structured interviews allowed me to follow a structure whilst still being flexible and open (Gillham, 2000, p. 7). Flexibility was more important than a rigid structure, as this allowed the interviews to flow. I was able to probe for further answers, whilst at the same time the participants were able to develop their responses and express their thoughts and

opinions (Gray, 2009). This method undoubtedly offered a far more fruitful extraction of data (Glaser and Straus, 1967).

As some of the participants work in organisations located outside of the UK only four were face-to-face interviews, whilst the remainder were carried out remotely using Skype or Teams video calling. Three interviews took place in-person, in private meeting rooms or offices, one in a participant's private office, one at Coventry University and one at Northampton University. Eight interviews took place using Skype or Teams video calls and were carried out in my office at home or in a private office at Staffordshire University. The interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes.

Conducting the interviews remotely did present some challenges. There were occasions where the Internet connection was slow causing a slight delay. Additionally, participant 4 was located in Finland and adverse weather conditions led to connection issues. Once the call disconnected and when we managed to reconnect the sound was intermittent. Despite using the chat function to type the questions, the technical issues prevailed which meant we had to terminate the interview. When I contacted the participant to rearrange, they explained that they no longer wished to participate. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage, without having to provide a reason, in accordance with Staffordshire University's ethical guidelines (2019). Additionally, prior to the interviews, participants were informed that should they wish to withdraw, any data collected up to that point would still be retained for research purposes. Transparency is a crucial aspect of qualitative research as emphasised by Bryman (2008).

Adopting mixed methods allowed the research to utilise diverse approaches to ensure a comprehensive analysis. Semi-structured interviews played a crucial role in the research, building insightful narratives (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2013, p. 864), additionally, the study integrated an analysis of the PMS case studies across Europe. According to CR, there is no assumption that one explanation of PMS is necessarily true, but that other explanations may be more powerful, when taking account of other arguments and empirical information. PMS are not just

reducible to inefficient firearms legislation, or mental health problems, therefore comparing and contrasting knowledge from different individuals, different locations, and different knowledge is imperative. Intensive methods such as interviews and case studies are more capable of describing a phenomenon (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2013), and according to Tsoukas (1989, p. 556) are epistemologically valid, truth claims can be evaluated in terms of real-world evidence, and some measure of shared understanding is possible. By combining these methodologies, a more nuanced and extensive understanding was achieved (Trahan and Stewart, 2013, p. 63). The data gathered in Stage One provided a broad overview, while the qualitative data added depth and meaning, the subsequent section will discuss the data analysis techniques employed in the study.

3.6 Data Analysis and Coding

Continuing with a mixed methods approach the data analysis combined elements of both inductive and deductive analysis, although Fryer (2022) suggests that rather than inductive or deductive it is data and theory led, therefore the research will use both terms interchangeably. Inductive analysis involves deriving general principles or theories from specific observations while deductive analysis tests existing theories against empirical data (Bryman, 2008). The case studies were analysed using the MSF, which suggests policy change occurs when the three streams converge, therefore deductive analysis was applied to the case studies. Deductive coding categories were based on the theoretical framework guiding that stage of the research, policy, politics, problems, windows and policy entrepreneurs. The process of analysing the case studies looked for evidence of problems gaining attention, policy solutions being developed or adapted and political windows of opportunity opening. For a full discussion of the MSF and the analysis of the case studies, see Chapter 4.

The purpose of qualitative interviews is to collect data and explore patterns, therefore inductive analysis supported the emergence of themes and patterns from the data. Qualitative research naturally produces qualitative data, in this case, a large volume of textual material that was generated during the participant interviews. Qualitative research using CR as a philosophical and methodological

framework ensured a flexible process of coding and data analysis that is consistent with CR ontology and epistemology (Fletcher, 2017). The CR approach challenges traditional assumptions, asserting that qualitative research can and should produce causal knowledge. Multiple valid interpretations of reality exist, and the research design remained deliberately flexible. Rather than prescribing a specific method of data analysis, CR provides a framework for understanding the relationship between the phenomena under observation and the underlying causal mechanisms

Once the interview recordings were transferred from the Dictaphone to my computer, they were transcribed verbatim. The use of the DSS Player software and an Olympus foot switch ensured that the interviews were efficiently transcribed whilst maintaining focus on the content. As emphasised by Bailey (2008), transcribing should be viewed as more than a technical task, the transcripts reflect the researchers' interpreted data, they are not just neutral records of events.

The research employed a mixed-method approach that combined deductive and inductive thematic analysis, guided by CR principles. The MSF provided a deductive framework from which to organise the data into the problem, policy, and politics streams. Whilst the emergent themes generated through an inductive approach ensured a comprehensive analysis, producing both theory-driven and data-driven insights.

A combination of NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) and manual coding techniques were the chosen methods of data analysis. NVivo helped to manage, analyse and visualise the qualitative interview data (Dhakal, 2022), additionally, the text search functions, such as 'include stemmed words' allowed for comprehensive data exploration. Manual coding however, proved more effective for deeper familiarisation, aligning with Fryer (2022) who recommends using software such as NVivo but suggests that some steps in thematic analysis should be paper based, such as reading through the data or during initial coding. The coding process followed Braun and Clarke's (2013) thematic analysis (TA) approach, this involved familiarisation with the data,

initial coding, theme development, reviewing and refinement. The coding process yielded a rich set of themes; both aligned with the MSF and emerging inductively from the data.

The methodology prioritised a comprehensive, systematic approach that balanced theoretical frameworks with data-driven insights, reflecting the complex nature of the research subject. This hybrid approach that integrated CR, MSF and TA provided a robust framework for analysing the interviews and case studies. Applying established theoretical lenses whilst remaining open to new emerging themes offered a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics of PMS and related policy responses.

Key themes included policy windows, problem framing, cultural attitudes towards firearms and the role of focusing events on policy change. Codes were developed to capture nuances within these themes, such as 'media influence', 'victim advocacy', 'political climate'. For instance, when analysing discussions about the Dunblane massacre, codes like 'public outrage' (problem stream) and 'firearm control legislation' (policy stream) emerged alongside inductive codes such as 'cultural shift in firearm perception'. The interplay between deductive codes (problem, policy and politics streams) and inductive codes (cultural congeniality, something must be done phenomenon) allowed for a comprehensive analysis that both validated and expanded upon the MSF. This coding structure facilitated the identification of patterns across different cases and stakeholder perspectives, enabling a comprehensive understanding of multifaceted nature of PMS and related policy responses, aligning with the research objectives and the CR framework. The next section will outline the main ethical issues relevant to this research.

3.7 Ethics

As the research involved the transfer of information from participants, ethical approval was vital, particularly as it is doctoral research. The University of Brighton's Tier 1 Research Ethics application was completed and approved. However, to ensure the research process was ethically sound, after transferring to Staffordshire University I applied for ethical approval via the JSS Ethics Panel and

the application was approved in October 2022 (see [appendix 3](#)). This process clarified that I had addressed the ethical issues, and ensured that the relevant supporting documents were prepared, including the participant information sheet, consent form and interview schedule. Additionally, that the procedures for maintaining confidentiality, anonymity and the storage and use of data were established.

According to Markham and Buchanan (2012) different ethical issues may become relevant at each juncture of the research project. A fundamental consideration when conducting research, is to ensure that there are no issues of harm, either physically or emotionally. Although the research project involved human participants, they were researchers, advocates, law enforcement and professionals, who were consulted about their specialist areas of knowledge and expertise relating to PMS, firearms and legislative responses. It was not intended to interview about particular individuals (who might be involved in firearms crime), illegalities or incidents but rather about more aggregated policy issues and processes. The research was therefore considered low risk for both the researcher and the interviewees.

Once I had received ethical approval and the participants had confirmed their willingness to participate, the consent forms (see [appendix 1](#)) and participant information sheets (see [appendix 2](#)) were emailed to participants, who were asked to sign to confirm that they agreed to the terms. The participants' occupations, and in some cases prior involvement in research, negated the need to explain the consent form in depth. Comprehensive information regarding the research was given to the participants, enabling them to make a fully informed decision regarding their participation (Davies, 2006), aligning with a crucial ethical principle in social research (Bryman, 2008). Consent was obtained prior to the interviews and confirmed verbally during the recording of interviews (Israel and Hay, 2006). Once participants returned their forms, physical copies were kept in a locked filing cabinet that only I had access to. All information supplied by the participants was confidential, unless they consented to its disclosure. Additionally, access to the data was restricted and only my supervisors and I had access to it.

Whilst confidentiality and anonymity of participants must be respected (Bryman, 2008), the interviewees were given the option to either be named and/or for their affiliated organisation to be named. Nine participants chose to waive their anonymity. Whilst this is not standard procedure, it is something undertaken by Doran (2014) during her research into media constructions and policy implications of USA school shootings. The rationale for this was simple. Although the research involved the sensitive topic of firearms crime, it focused on perspectives of PMS and legislative responses; and the participants were involved in researching or advocating against firearms violence, rather than criminally involved in firearms crime. Hiding participants' identities assumes they are vulnerable and need protection. Therefore, offering participants an option to waive their anonymity removes any presumed vulnerability that might be associated with them. Moreover, the opportunity to share their identity might offer a conduit for their voices to be heard, whilst providing the reassurance that they would have control over what is published.

Conscious of the need to balance my desire to obtain data, against the rights of the participants to autonomy and privacy (Sumner, 2006), I ensured that anonymity and confidentiality were maintained at all times, this was particularly important for the two participants who chose to remain anonymous. Minimising harm was of the utmost importance. Any information was given voluntarily and remained private, identifying information was removed from the transcripts and the participants were given a number, this ensured that privacy was maintained, and they were not identifiable by any information (Dantzker and Hunter, 2006). Interviews took place in private, to limit the likelihood that they could be overheard and were recorded using a Dictaphone. Where interviews were conducted in person, it was in a location where privacy could be assured, and the interview would not be interrupted.

The storage of confidential material and forms is equally as important as participants anonymity and confidentiality (Bryman, 2008), when not in use the Dictaphone was also stored in the locked filing cabinet with the consent forms and any notes taken during the interviews. Once completed the interviews were transcribed, transcriptions were kept on a secure USB pen drive, which was

password protected, the pen drive was also kept in the locked filing cabinet and the data files on the Dictaphone were deleted once uploaded to my Mac. Upon completion of the interview participants were informed that they could request a copy of the transcripts of their interview at any time. Should this be required, participants would be able to confirm that the transcript accurately reflected what they had said. This positive research practice is recommended by MacFarlane (2009, p. 63) as it not only ensures validity and accuracy, this is particularly important as for some participants their identities are revealed, it also keeps the research participants updated about the research. The ethical issues relevant to this research have been explored, moving forward the following section will consider the research limitations.

3.8 Research Limitations

Whilst the chosen methodology offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge that there are limitations. The MSF whilst useful for understanding policy processes may not fully capture the complexities of real-world policymaking, particularly in the context of PMS. To address some of these limitations modification to the MSF were incorporated, such as considering inter-stream conflicts and cultural factors, discussed in full in the Findings and Discussion Chapters.

Additionally, whilst qualitative research, case studies and policy studies provide depth, they nonetheless face challenges in terms of generalisability according to quantitative criteria (Sanjurjo, 2020). Smaller numbers of participants are not considered adequate to represent larger populations. However, in addition to the benefits of qualitative research in emphasising the value of individual lived experiences, it also demonstrates how each participants' perspective contributes to the area under investigation. It is possible to replace statistical generalisation by applying the study's findings to similar situations in similar contexts (George and Bennett, 2005). There were also practical limitations when studying countries outside of the UK, such as language barriers. However, these limitations, will be discussed in the strengths and limitations section of Chapter 8. Despite these limitations, the study focused on collecting rich and detailed data, prioritising quality over quantity.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the research methodology utilised during this study, that combined deductive and inductive analysis, whilst guided by CR principles. Adopting a mixed method and multi-stage approach, the MSF provided the theoretical foundation, whilst the semi-structured interviews and case studies offered rich qualitative data.

The following four chapters will present the research findings, commencing with a discussion around Stage One of the research, the case studies, including the rationale for selecting which countries and PMS events, time period and the inclusion/exclusion criteria. The MSF provided a valuable framework to analyse the policy process, looking for evidence of problems gaining attention, policy solutions being developed and political windows of opportunity opening.

Chapter 4 : Stage One The Case Studies

“for someone to point a gun so many times at innocent victims and then deliberately pull the trigger is cold, calculating and inhuman” (North, 2000, p. 32)

4.1 Selecting the Case Studies Introduction

The first stage of the research involved an analysis of public mass shootings (PMS) that occurred across Europe between May 1987 and December 2016 and met the inclusion criteria for this research. This period was selected to capture data across a larger period, and specifically to include Hungerford in 1987, one of two defining incidents that resulted in significant changes to firearms legislation. There were 18 PMS identified during the research period. All of the perpetrators were male except one and they all occurred in Europe in public or semi-public spaces. Public refers to those open public spaces or public buildings that can be accessed by the public or serve a community function, therefore, schools are considered public. A total of 137 people were killed and a further 260 were injured (see Table 4:1), resulting in 397 direct victims. The definition of PMS used for this research are shootings that occur in public or semi-public spaces, that result in three or more randomly selected victims with at least one fatality and only one perpetrator. The term victim included those fatally shot and injured, however, does not include the perpetrator. Due to the size of Europe, it was beyond the scope of this research to include data for every country. Therefore, a *priori* decision was made to focus on only four European countries, this provided an opportunity for in-depth research.

The discussions will not include any reference to the names of the perpetrators, an exception to this would be if they were directly named. As noted by Lankford and Madfis (2018) and Anisin (2022a) it is important to refrain from naming perpetrators to avoid their notoriety and limit the possibility of unintended fame attribution. The perpetrators' names can be found in Table 4:1 below, and information regarding the type of firearm and the causal factor can be found in [appendix 9](#).

Table 4:1 Overview of PMS Case Studies
(Authors own data)

4.1.1 Catalytic and Static Events

When selecting which countries to focus on it was necessary to include PMS that led to policy change and those that did not. Hurka (2017) uses the terms 'positive' and 'negative', however, to avoid the moral connotations of those terms, whilst distinguishing between the events and the aftermath, the terms catalytic and static were selected. Catalytic highlights those events that acted as a catalyst for legislative change, whilst static reflects the lack of change in those that did not.

Dunblane in 1996; Antwerp in 2006; and Winnenden in 2009 are examples of catalytic cases, selected because they resulted in amendments to their legislative framework following a PMS. According to Innes (2004), such incidents become signal crimes, acts that change the way people and institutions think about safety and security. Certain incidents can be disproportionately influential, causing people to believe they are at risk, that something is wrong or lacking and that this requires some form of protective action. Innes and Fielding (2002) discuss a triadic relationship of the three components that are consequential in the construction of signal crimes, the object, perception and reaction. Beliefs about potential danger are constructed by those individuals in the presence of these signal crimes (Innes and Fielding, 2002, p. 5), it is this 'signalling' of danger, that when combined with the correct circumstances can generate demand for legislative change. Strong

signals result from those incidences of 'sufficient gravity' and seriousness. Those incidents considered more serious not only generate a significant degree of concern from the public (Innes and Fielding, 2002, p. 5), they also increase calls for stricter policy changes to prevent further reoccurrences; determining how subsequent responses are managed and influenced by the authorities (Innes, 2015). Such events can disproportionately influence policy responses.

Frequently there is an increase in public concern which drives politicians to be seen to be doing something. At times responding with new laws, that result in what Innes (2015) calls legislative reflex, an attempt to appease the public's calls for something to be done. This was the case following the Paris 2015 terrorist attacks, when the European Commission (EC) proposed measures to amend the European Union's firearm framework, strengthening it significantly whilst further harmonising it (Duquet, 2016). Moreover, in Dunblane in 1996, when 16 children and their teacher were fatally shot, there were significant legislative changes (discussed in Section 4.2.4). Using the MSF this research will explore the relationship between the three streams, and their joining that can precipitate policy change.

There were also PMS that did not result in any change. This research will also explore static cases; Monkseaton in 1989, Cumbria in 2010, Hyvinkaa in 2012, and Imatra in 2016. It is imperative that both types of cases are considered. Focusing on catalytic cases could lead to confirmation bias, it is possible to retrospectively identify an external shock, such as a PMS, and hold it responsible for any political development (Hurka, 2017). However, this perspective might overlook similar cases where no change occurred in the policy area, even though changes were just as likely (Hurka, 2017). Furthermore, it is not feasible to consider the issue of non-events, thereby excluding non-occurrences which, according to Anisin (2022b), presents a challenge for case comparisons when trying to understand what might cause a PMS. Although this research is focused on responses to PMS, rather than causal factors.

As discussed earlier, originally 10 countries were selected however, after further consideration it was decided that rather than selecting countries according to their

location within Europe, the research would build upon Cavadino and Dignan's (2006a) typology of late-modern capitalist societies. Their typology was based on an analysis of Esping-Anderson's (1990, p. 32) regime tripartite framework used for comparing welfare states, broadly categorised as; liberal, conservative corporatist and social democratic. This chapter will begin with a discussion outlining the framework used when categorising the case studies, before discussing the case studies, the rationale for their inclusion, how they were perpetrated, and any subsequent policy changes.

4.1.2 Typology of Societies/Countries

The intention of this research is to explore firearm regulation regimes rather than welfare states, and the framework is adopted as a way of organising the countries selected for the case studies. The purpose of this typology was to identify similarities in the political-economic organisation and also their social structures, that both characterise those that belong to the same 'family grouping' whilst distinguishing them from those in other groupings (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006b). Whilst the political-economic systems may influence approaches to firearms control, other factors such as cultural attitudes and specific political circumstances also play roles in shaping policies and response, as discussed below and in Chapters 5 and 6. The framework describes, conceptualises and distinguishes types of societies in terms of policy goals and instruments (Palier, 2006), defining a body of principles, values and political, economic and social objectives. There is a correlation between criminal justice systems and welfare state regimes, with penal policy often reflecting the inclusivity or exclusivity of each society (Häkkinen, 2020), and as such the framework is useful when considering policy change and is one of the reasons it was used. Although there is still need for a criminological examination of the qualitative differences, including an exploration of the effects of the politico-economic form, instead of exclusively looking at the cultural, moral or regulatory processes that mediate, manage or resist these effects (Hall and McLean, 2009, p. 333).

Welfare institutions shape debates, political preferences and policy choices, affecting the position of those involved in these debates can then frame how interests and resources are mobilised by actors (Palier, 2006). Public policy

commentators also began to engage in these discussions, adopting similar principles to differentiate between the policy regimes, and the ideological and psycho-social dimension to policy regimes became more explicit (Squires, 2015). Rodgers (2008) examined policy discourses in varying conceptions of criminal and social problems. Similarly, Cavadino and Dignan (2006a; 2006b) extended the political economy conception of regime analysis into the field of penalty and law and order, although amending the liberal category to neo-liberal and including an additional regime type of oriental corporatism. Building upon more recent work, that characterises varying degrees of effective governance over violence and disorder, Squires (2015) argues that strong and cohesive States are able to more effectively manage levels of violence and disorder, adding a further two types of violence regimes; failed or failing state and frontier or war zone, see also Hough, Jackson and Bradford (2013), who included the following groupings; Southern European, Post Communist and Israel. However, as this research is concerned with PMS that occurred within the European context, oriental corporatism and those added more recently were excluded.

Discussions relating to welfare regimes and theoretical explanations often focus on their conceptualisation and quantification (see Esping-Andersen, 1990, Cavadino and Dignan, 2006b, Hough, Jackson and Bradford, 2013), and have received much criticism (Arts and Gelissen, 2002; Van Voorhis, 2002). Flint (2008) argues that previous research would benefit from close empirical engagement with the nuances, contradictions and uncertainties of policy. While the typology has provided a way to describe and differentiate between societies, it requires evidence of the observable qualitative differences between cultures (Squires, 2015).

Similar to Cavadino and Dignan (2006b) in their use of the typology to explore the extent the cultural, material and ideological factors shape forms of penalty, this research will consider the extent to which these factors have an impact on responses to PMS. Cavadino and Dignan's typology provided a framework to categorise the different societies based on their characteristics and the structures that shape them. Using this framework, it was possible to divide four of the original 10 countries, into three groups according to their regime and political economy,

recognising the role of cultural and political factors in the definition of the regime (Squires, 2015). All of the countries/societies selected for inclusion in this research, similar to that of Cavadino and Dignan's are 'Western' developed, industrial democracies. As such, they can be conceptualised within a radical pluralist framework of society, that attempts to synthesise aspects of Marxist, Durkheimian and Weberian traditions (Cavadino and Dignan, 2002, p.76-79).

Radical pluralism conceives of societies as containing a plurality of interest groups that are all contending to have power exerted in their favour (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006b, p. 12), acknowledging that the nature of relationships between politics, economics, ideological and material factors vary within different types of societies (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006b, p. 13). The relationships that exist between state, citizens and interest groups are also significantly different across these countries (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006b, p. 15). However, explanations of why policies change or not are only likely to be discovered in the history and culture of those places (Tonry, 2009, p. 376). It is the intention of this research to examine the case studies, considering legislative/policy changes, and the related cultural, political and social factors, within the case studies and interview data in relation to responses to PMS.

Similar to the typology developed by Squires (2014a), organising the case studies according to regime type is intended to move beyond regime descriptions that are based upon notions of political structure and social spending to instead, embrace conflict, violence, legality and political cultures and values.

4.1.3 The Case Studies

Using the framework discussed, four countries were selected across Europe. This enabled a full and critical discussion whilst allowing enough time to conduct and analyse the interviews. Focusing on a larger number would have restricted the data that was gathered and reduced the time available to conduct the remainder of the research; any fewer would have limited the range of data available and it was important to ensure that there was a diverse range of data, with varying political preferences and levels of ownership, crime and gun cultures.

The following countries were selected as they represent a variety of cultures without limiting the scope for diversity in terms of firearm ownership (see Figure 4:1) and control, and incidences of PMS. They are organised according to the typology discussed previously:

- Neo-liberal; Great Britain
- Conservative corporatism; Germany and Belgium
- Social democratic corporatism; Finland

Figure 4:1 Rate of Ownership by Country
(Source: Alpers, 2022)

Within the Neo-liberal section, the PMS events will be discussed individually, however, for the remaining countries the discussion will draw together the individual incidences per country. The MSF will be used to analyse the PMS events, discussed in full below. In addition, this research will also draw on examples from other countries to provide further evidence and examples. The three groups; neo-liberal, conservative corporatist and social democratic corporatism will be discussed below.

4.2 Neo-Liberal

Neo-liberalism has increased in prominence in global discourse since the 1980s (Venkatesan *et al.*, 2015). Originating from the works of Hayek (1960) and Friedman (1962), it revives 19th century economic liberalism, and places emphasis

on free-market capitalism and individualism over collectivism. Despite resistance from the liberal left (Hall and McLean, 2009, p. 329), in governmental action, neo-liberal has become the predominant ideology, particularly in politically conservative countries (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006b).

With its adversarial political system, Great Britain embraced neo-liberal market principles in the late 20th century (Hough, Jackson and Bradford, 2013), eroding its social democratic elements. This shift began under Thatcher in the 1980s and continued during New Labour's tenure from 1997, albeit to a lesser extent. Although Britain was not considered a prime example of neo-liberalism, because of its previous commitment to social democratic policies its transition weakened its social democratic foundations (Cavadino and Dignan 2006a, p. 442-443).

Conversely, the USA are considered the archetypal neo-liberal society (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006a; 2006b), with a climate favourable to widespread firearm ownership. Indeed, the USA accounted for 29.7% of global PMS between 1998 and 2012, despite having less than 5% of the world's population (Lankford, 2019, p. 73; Lott and Moody, 2019). Within the USA self-defence and freedom are the foundation for which human rights supposedly rest, and this is rooted in Western neo-liberalism (Squires, 2015). Although neo-liberal aspects of American culture are exported globally (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006a, p. 437), other countries maintain distinct characteristics. For example, Great Britain's response to PMS, undoubtedly due to its gun culture and lobbies (Martin, 2003). This highlights how local cultures, legal systems, and political will can influence how PMS are responded to across different nations (Squires, 2015).

Societies typically share similar perspectives and norms (Elias, 2000, p. 467; Pinker, 2011) existing in stable and balanced states of 'unchanging equilibrium'. When rule-breaking or non-conformity disrupts this balance, social change can occur as one of the unintended consequences (Acemoglu and Jackson, 2017). Any actions against societal norms could experience disapproval of varying degrees, during which time society strives to return to its original stable state (Elias, 1994).

Although modern societies face new threats such as terrorism or cyber-crimes, historically violence has been an omnipresent feature of domestic life, that is often exploited by elites (Nieburg 1962, p. 865) who intend to improve their status or subject others to their views or values. However, as noted by Pinker (2011) the civilising process and modernity have contributed to an overall reduction in violence, when compared to historical norms, and some societies. For example, practices once considered commonplace are now both legally prohibited and socially unacceptable, such as torture and domestic violence (Women's Aid, 2016)

The progressive strengthening of firearms legislation may be considered an aspect of the 'civilisation thesis' (Elias, 1982; Pinker, 2011). PMS are viewed as rare anomalies or isolated tragedies, and consequently substantial changes are seldom enacted by most societies. Public and media interest in firearms legislation is typically sporadic and incident-driven (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2012). Although public opinion has increased in influence in Great Britain, policymakers and lobbying groups remain crucial (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006b). However, unlike conservative corporatist countries and Nordic social democratic countries, interest groups in Britain are not fully integrated into decision-making institutions, partly due to trade unions resisting any reduction of their independence (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006, p. 442).

Pinker (2011) views elements of neo-liberal thinking, such as free-markets and tough-on-crime approaches as part of a new re-civilising phase apparent from the early 1990s (Squires, 2015). During which period political promises to crack down on crime overshadowed notions of consent and rule of law (Hough, Jackson and Bradford, 2013, p. 3-4). Neo-liberal countries generally have higher rates of imprisonment than conservative corporatist ones, although the Netherlands are an exception (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006a, p. 446). The following section will explore PMS, analysing legislative and policy changes in Great Britain using the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF).

4.2.1. Great Britain – A History of Firearms Ownership and Control

"The purpose of firearms legislation is generally, to control the supply and possession of all rifles, guns, and pistols that could be used for criminal or

subversive purposes, while recognising that individuals may own and use firearms for legitimate purposes” (Beard, 2013)

Neo-liberal countries are said to have some of the harshest policies (Tonry, 2009), Great Britain, for example, has some of the most restrictive firearm’s legislation globally. In contrast, in the USA, arguments for Republican individualism centre around the belief that gun control and therefore, the state, disarm citizens. British firearm legislation has been characterised as collective paternalism and class privilege (Squires, 2014a), and it is this, rather than neo-liberalism, that has led to restrictive firearm control. While gun control is typically considered a ‘liberal’ policy, interpretations of liberalism vary based on principles of autonomy and equality (Hughes and Hunt, 2000). This section examines firearms control in Great Britain.

A firearm is legally defined as a lethal barrelled weapon capable of discharging projectiles (Beard, 2013). Although parliamentary debates have questioned the definition of firearms, and the use of the word ‘lethal’ and the balance between controlling lethal weapons and allowing ‘reasonable’ people to access them. Indeed, some argue that firearms’ lethal potential outweighs their sporting utility (Ferrers MP, 1988), a debate that will be explored further.

Firearms availability indicates their societal significance, influencing culture, laws, and politics. Higher ownerships rates mean more people are affected by regulations, making them politically sensitive (Hurka, 2017, p. 55). Despite low firearm ownership, 5.1 per 100 people (see Figure 4:2) and restrictive legislation, Great Britain has experienced 4 PMS since 1987 (see Table 4:1), according to the definition used for this research, including examples of both catalytic and static cases.

Figure 4:2 Fatalities and Levels of Firearm Ownership
(Authors own data)

This combination of factors makes it a valuable case study for examining PMS and policy responses.

The effectiveness of firearms control is tied to many factors that are specific to individual countries, and Greenwood (1972) asserts that valuable insights can be gained by studying the history of a problem and attempts to address it. Firearms control in Great Britain was a relatively new innovation, that was administered by the police from the late 1920s (Greenwood, 1972, p. 15). Prior to this, firearm possession was subject to minimal restrictions (Olson and Kopel, 2003). The 1688 Bill of Rights established that Protestant subjects may have firearms for their defence. However, social unrest intensified pressure for firearm control and legislation was rushed through to prevent a revolution (Olson and Kopel, 2003). This led to the Seizure of Arms Act 1820, the only measure that was introduced prior to the 20th century (Greenwood, 1972). Whilst the Gun Licences Act 1870 was introduced it focused on poaching rather than ownership restrictions, indeed early attempts to control firearms were largely unsuccessful.

The Regulation of Carrying Arms Bill 1881, and subsequent proposals in 1883 and 1887 also failed to progress (Greenwood, 1972, p. 15). Due to their criminal appeal, attention turned to pistols (Greenwood, 1972) and specifically those less than 15 inches. The Pistols Bill was proposed in 1893, although this also lacked

support, and despite being read again in 1895, it was defeated once more (Greenwood, 1972). These failures set the stage for later firearms legislation.

In 1903 the Pistols Act was the first successful firearms control legislation in Britain (Olson and Kopel, 2003). Although Greenwood (1972) argued that it was a watered-down version of the earlier 1893 and 1895 Bills, and as such contained the same loopholes, and consequently was ineffective. Nonetheless, on this occasion there was minimal opposition, unlike previous attempts, which signalled a subtle shift in attitudes towards firearms regulation.

A new Pistols Bill was under consideration in 1911 when Russian anarchists shot and killed three police officers, injuring two others, leading to a proposal for the Aliens (Prevention of Crime) Bill 1911, which also failed to progress beyond its First Reading (Greenwood, 1972). Arguments against restrictive firearms control, frequently centre on individual liberties. Although, these primarily represent the interests of the upper class (discussed in Chapters 6 and 7). Historically, rifles and shotguns were considered a normal part of a well-to-do household (Karp, 2003, p. 196), confirming how firearm ownership has been associated with the elite. Indeed, Lilly (2001, p. 70) discussed the contrast between knife and firearms ownership, noting that the latter was associated with the 'upper echelons and the landed gentry'. Olson and Kopel (2003) concurred that shotguns were considered to be hunting tools of the landed gentry, whilst widespread ownership of rifles by the working classes was considered an asset to national security. This class distinction has influenced firearms legislation and debates around firearm control.

However, following World War I, the Firearms Act 1920 marked a significant shift in British firearms control, shotguns and airguns were still considered to be sporting weapons and therefore continued to be exempt from control (Olson and Kopel, 2003). Nonetheless, over the course of a century, the right to bear arms that once was justified was becoming defunct in Britain (Olson and Kopel, 2003). The Firearms Act 1920 was intended to prevent criminals from obtaining revolvers, and now individuals were not only required to obtain a firearms certificate, they also had to demonstrate a 'good reason' for possession and prove that they were trustworthy (Olson and Kopel, 2003). In addition to defining firearms, the Act

established provisions for certification, prohibited persons and exclusions (Greenwood, 1972). The Home Secretary clarified that the legislation was intended to prevent criminals from possessing dangerous firearms, particularly revolvers (Greenwood, 1972). The Act gave Chief Constables the authority to deny anybody deemed unfit permits, effectively replacing the right to bear arms with a permitting system for pistols and rifles (Greenwood, 1972).

However, the Firearms Act 1920 failed to effectively reduce the criminal use of firearms, partly due to the exclusion of shotguns and air weapons. The outcome was further legislative amendments and acts. The Firearms and Imitation Firearms (Criminal Use) Bill was introduced in 1933 (Greenwood, 1998), quickly followed by the 1934 amendments that prohibited anyone under 17 years of age from possessing firearms. Whilst in 1937 existing legislation was consolidated by the Firearms Act 1937 and this was largely accepted by the shooting community for 25 years (Greenwood, 1972, p. 52).

In 1963, based on the Bodkin Committee recommendations, the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1963 further refined the law (Olson and Kopel, 2003), although there were further amendments in 1965 and 1967. In response to increasing gun crime in the 1960s, the Firearms Act 1968 amalgamated all firearm legislation. This resulted in 55 separate and complex offences (Squires, 2008), placing restrictions on the possession, handling, and distribution of weapons and ammunition. Section 1 required certificates for firearms and ammunition, excluding shotguns and air weapons, while Section 2 addressed shotgun regulations. The 1968 Act remains the foundation of firearms legislation, although some have argued that it has been amended so many times that it is largely incomprehensible (Greenwood, 2000). However, it was amended further following the Hungerford PMS. The following section will examine the PMS that occurred in Britain, beginning with Hungerford in 1987 (see Table 4:2 below).

Table 4:2 UK's Public Mass Shootings
(Authors own data)

4.2.2 Hungerford 19th August 1987

The Problem Stream - Focusing Event

The Hungerford shooting is one example of a focusing event that marked a key turning point drawing attention to firearms legislation. The perpetrator, using a handgun and two semi-automatic rifles, killed 16 people, injuring a further 15 in a series of shootings in two locations in Wiltshire and Hungerford (Williams, 2012; Hurka, 2017). Whilst it appeared that the perpetrator had complied with all conditions of the licencing requirements, when they purchased three shotguns and five firearms between December 1986 and August 1987 (HMIC, 1987); another unlisted firearm was later discovered (Earl of Caithness MP, 1987).

As discussed previously, it is not just that issues arise on the political agenda, it is how they are constructed or interpreted (Birkland, 2007, p. 26). Following Hungerford, debates within the media, public and parliament focused on attributing blame, emphasising the glorification of violence on TV, the perpetrator's mental health and access to firearms. Of particular interest was their suitability to possess so many weapons, specifically the Kalashnikov rifle, which raised questions regarding the culpability of the police force responsible for issuing his licences.

Whilst many agreed that there needed to be further strengthening of legislation, citing concerns about the UK becoming increasingly violence-ridden (BBC, 1987) there was strong opposition. Critics argued that it was not possible to 'legislate against nervous breakdowns' (Guardian, 1987a) and that 'self-restraint is preferable to legislation' (Guardian, 1987b). Due to the circumstances surrounding the shooting, there was extensive media coverage. Within the four months following the massacre, there were 297 media stories, focused largely on firearms control and access, the need to strengthen control, and the impact of TV violence.

The increased media attention could have influenced policymakers to act, focusing events such as Hungerford can highlight the urgent need for reform, increasing the likelihood of policy change (Hurka and Nebel, 2013, p. 392). Hungerford exposed weaknesses in operational communication and armed response capacity (Pollock, 2013), highlighting a requirement for stakeholders to implement common systems to manage such events, it also reignited the firearms debate.

Despite the apparently unnoticed upwards trend in the criminal use of firearms since the mid 1960s (Squires, 2015), the 1980s saw handguns overtake shotguns in criminal contexts (Squires *et al.*, 2008). Handgun offences increased significantly during the first five years following Hungerford (Squires *et al.*, 2008). The combined media coverage, legislative changes, increased awareness and shifts in public sentiment are likely to have contributed to this increase. Public anxiety was notably high, and the events of Hungerford demonstrated rather than created the urgent need for firearm control (Hattersley MP, 1987). The policy window opened in the problem stream, described as indicating how American gun culture had spread (O'Connor, 1987), the Hungerford massacre provided an opportunity for activists and politicians to push for firearm control with substantial support for new legislation.

Within a year of Hungerford, the Firearms Consultative Committee (FCC) was established under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988. Although Hungerford did not create the problem that the Firearms Amendment Bill sought to address, it underlined the nature of that problem indelibly (Hurd MP, 1988). The Bill purported to recognise 'the proper and reasonable interests' of the shooting community with public safety of paramount concern (Ferrers MP, 1988). The intention was to advise the government on firearm safety to ensure a balance between enabling sports shooters and protecting society (McNair-Wilson MP, 1987), rather than focusing on firearm control (Squires, 2015).

However, the FCC faced criticism regarding both its composition and its perceived biases. Membership criteria required knowledge of firearms and practical experience in their use, which effectively excluded those advocating for stricter legislation. As a result, critics argued that the committee only served those with

vested interests in maintaining the status quo (Hattersley MP, 1987). While some defended the need for an expert committee, MPs Davies and Bellingham described themselves as responsible shotgun users (Bellingham MP, 1988), representing constituencies where game shooting and shooting clubs formed an important part of local life. They along with others positioned themselves as 'peaceful, rural users of firearms' (Mischon MP, 1988).

The Gun Control Network (GCN) nonetheless, argued that the FCC must represent broader interests than those of the powerful gun lobby, ultimately leading to it eventually being disbanded (GCN, 2016). The debate over the FCC's composition and purpose illustrates the tension between demand for reform and entrenched cultural values. Cultural connections between gun ownership, masculinity and notions of 'Englishness' and 'respectability' were institutionalised as sensible, rational and balanced sources of discourse on guns, in both Home Office and parliamentary circles in the period between Hungerford and Dunblane (Taylor, 1999, p. 120).

Arguments in support of the committee, suggested that the proposed measures to tighten gun control were a result of government panic and media hysteria following Hungerford (Nelson MP, 1988). Despite the barrage of gun club propaganda, there was agreement that more stringent, comprehensive firearms regulation was needed, public anxiety was inevitably high, and it was hoped that the widespread agreement would be reflected in the House (Hattersley MP, 1987).

There was no public inquiry following Hungerford, although a short internal report by HMIC was made available to MPs (Greenwood, 2000). The report concluded that existing legislation neither contributed to nor could have prevented the massacre (Smith, 2006). However, the climate became favourable for enacting changes in both the law and administrative procedures which were considered desirable and long overdue (HMIC, 1987). The Home Office and police used the climate of public revulsion as a catalyst to press for legislation that would not otherwise have been enacted (Smith, 2006).

According to social constructivist approaches, social conditions are not treated automatically as social problems (Rochefort and Cobb, 1993). A number of actors must perceive the condition as severe enough to demand political action for an existing condition to be elevated to a problem (Hurka and Nebel, 2013, p. 392). Often a combination of factors is required to bring an idea to policy fruition (Kingdon, 1984, p. 81). However, it is not where the idea comes from, but what makes it take hold and grow that is key to understanding policy change (Kingdon, 1984, p. 76). Acting as what Birkland (2006) calls a focusing event, and Hurka (2017) an external shock, Hungerford created the demand amongst the media, public, and politicians for further legislation (Greenwood, 2000). Although according to Hogg MP (1987), the objective was to improve gun control and not merely increase restriction for the sake of being 'seen to be doing something'. It was also suggested that the Home Secretary was not ready to stand up to either the shotgun lobby or mail order lobby, and instead had proposed a vacuous amendment (Hattersley MP, 1987). This reflects the tension between competing pressures within the policy process, where the public's demand for action collided with entrenched interests, a theme that is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Policy Stream - Forming/Identifying Solutions

Within the policy stream solutions whirl around in a policy 'primeval soup' where alternatives are proposed, reconsidered and modified (Kingdon, 1984). When policy communities are receptive to ideas, combined with an open window and available solution, the outcome is a function of the mix of problems, their solutions, and participants and their resources. It is in this stream that researchers, academics and interest groups both inside and outside of government can couple solutions to problems and problems and solution to politics (Kingdon 1984). In this case the solution that was available came in the form of selected items from a Green Paper drafted by government in 1972, proposing the introduction of more restrictive controls than in the 1968 Act (Home Office, 1973), although there was no attempt to restrict availability or lethality of handguns (Squires, 2008).

Much of what was proposed in the Green Paper originated from the 1972 McKay report, written by a Chief Inspector who was asked to review the current law on firearms (Smith, 2006). During which time he established a working group of Chief Police Officers and Home Office officials to consult with (Greenwood, 2000). The

study was formalised in December 1970 but there were suggestions that preparatory work must have been going on for at least a year prior (Greenwood, 2000). The report contained no evidence to support its conclusions and has been subject to much debate, primarily as there was no real consultation and the entire proceedings were confidential (Greenwood, 2000). The study raised doubts about the effectiveness and efficiency of the system, although it has been argued that the working group were not interested in information which did not conform to pre-determined results and this increased concerns about the intention of those involved (Greenwood, 2000; Smith, 2006).

The report contained 70 conclusions, although a reduction in the number of firearms in private hands was considered the most desirable end, it also recommended that shotguns were placed under the same controls as rifles and pistols, thereby reducing the number of shotguns in private hands and seeking further restrictions on firearms of every class (Greenwood, 2000). When the Green Paper was first introduced it was given a 'hostile reception by all sections of the shooting community' and faced widespread opposition (Greenwood 2000). Perhaps importantly, as until this point there was no event or incident likely to provoke massive public concern, or political hysteria of the type which had been used as the means by which almost all firearms legislation has been rushed into place (Greenwood, 2000) amidst suggestions of knee-jerk reactions. The knee-jerk argument is often used as a defence against implementing changes (discussed in Section 7.2.2). However, Alpers and Ghazarian (2019, p. 228) note that a speedy response ensures that pro-gun lobbies are unable to exert their customary delaying influence on policy debates.

There was no attempt to analyse the incident to establish what further measures might help prevent a recurrence of such events and in an 'attempt to be seen to have done something' politicians appear to have instructed the Home Office to produce proposals to 'tighten legislation', leading the Home Office to select items from the agenda of the 1973 Green Paper (Greenwood, 2000). The reintroduction of these items presented the Home Office the opportunity to couple the problem to a solution. Although the extent to which their solution was appropriate or had any bearing on the problem is questionable. There are different forces driving the

political and policy stream, people might worry about a particular problem without having a solution to it, and forces in the political stream might prompt attention to an item (Kingdon, 1984, p. 150). Policymakers have to pay attention to a problem, at the same time begin receptive to the proposed solution (Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016).

Politics Stream - Engaging in Political Activities

Within the politics stream policymakers have the opportunity and motive to turn issues into policy, this can require them to modify their beliefs, considering changes in national mood or any feedback from political parties or interest groups (Cairney and Jones, 2016). Firearms control depends on three factors: the content of the law; the enforcement of the law; and the acceptance by those who own firearms of the need to co-operate fully in the law's application (Hattersley MP, 1987). Whilst the police and public were keen to see the tightening of firearm control there was significant opposition from those within the shooting community, and it was argued that the government had given way to the pro-gun lobby (Thomson, Stancich and Dickson, 1998). It was suggested that such co-operation would most likely come about if government came to a unanimous conclusion about stronger regulation (Hattersley MP, 1987). Agreement of the house would strengthen regulations, striking a blow against the improper use and possession of firearms, and against the gun culture developing in Britain but not before much consideration both inside and outside of parliament (Hattersley MP, 1987).

There was disappointment and a lack of general agreement throughout parliament on the proposals following Hungerford, both in terms of concern at the time about responses not being thought out with government keen not to introduce knee-jerk legislation (Barnes MP, 1987; Squires, 2000, p. 139). But equally, concern that minimal changes would be made, therefore not grasping the urgent need for a thorough review of the whole basis of firearms control. Parliamentary debates following Hungerford discussed public demand to strengthen firearms legislation and a motion proposing such change was supported by the House and police (Hattersley MP, 1987; Thomson, Stancich and Dickson, 1998). The issue of firearms was the first subject chosen to be debated in Opposition time, due to widespread concern among both the Opposition and some Conservative members (Taylor MP, 1987). Conservative members insisted the Home Secretary delay and

water down his proposals, whilst others urged him to go further, and push ahead with more stringent legislation (Taylor MP, 1987). It was argued that the amendment amounted to 'no more than a string of platitudes' with those in favour of further restrictions suggesting that the Home Secretary was not prepared to stand up to the shotgun lobby, resulting in a vacuous amendment (Hattersley MP, 1987).

Discussions centred around those in the shooting community, gun lobby and sports enthusiasts protesting proposed changes, and the implications for the Olympics and Commonwealth Games (Monro MP, 1987). Nevertheless, strong arguments emerged in favour of further firearm control. Barnes MP (1987) asserted that the recreational use of firearms should be secondary to the need for greater public safety, stating that 'any civil liberties implications arising from greater gun control should be considered subsidiary to ensuring the public are adequately protected', clearly the value of life should far exceed any sporting hobbies.

Despite arguments to the contrary and the barrage of gun club propaganda, public anxiety was inevitably high and heightened by the Hungerford tragedy. There was widespread agreement that more stringent and effective firearms regulations were needed. Whilst the opposition accepted that possession and use of firearms is legitimate and sometimes necessary, they also deemed that strict proposals for control were reasonable and importantly were supported by the general public and police federation (Hattersley MP, 1987).

Summary

The political debate combined with forces in the politics stream eventually culminated in an amendment to the existing Firearms Act 1968, leading to the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988. Amongst other things, the Act banned self-loading and semi-automatic pump-action rifles (except .22 rimfire calibre), certain semi-automatic and pump-action smoothbore guns, and smoothbore revolvers. Shotguns held with a shotgun certificate were now required to be registered and securely stored. However, it did not impose any restrictions on semi-automatic pistols similar to the one that had been used during the Hungerford shooting (Squires, 2000).

Hungerford illustrated the confluence of all three streams according to Kingdon's framework: a problem, an available solution, and a window of opportunity for policy change (Waddington and Hamilton, 1997, p. 98). However, despite public support for more stringent firearms control, the Hungerford shooting led to limited amendments. The changes that were advocated and implemented were considered to fall short amidst suggestions that the government had given way to the pro-gun lobby (Thomson, Stancich and Dickson, 1998). Furthermore, by establishing the new FCC, the 1988 Act effectively consolidated the shooting lobby's political power within a Home Office advisory committee. Over the next few years, the FCC significantly framed the emerging firearm safety (rather than gun control) agenda stream in the UK (Squires, 2021).

Following Hungerford emotions were high, this may have generated concern around firearms, but it did not prompt significant policy change, largely as demands for tighter controls were fought off by the gun lobby. Groups such as the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and some MPs supported reform. However, significant policy change is less likely to happen if there is no political champion or upcoming election close to the crisis (Hurka, 2017). This was evident in the case of Hungerford, whereas in the later Dunblane PMS (discussed in Section 4.2.4) the incoming Blair government used the upcoming election to call for change (Squires, 2021).

In response to the public pressure following Hungerford, the government did implement some changes. However, it could be argued these were largely symbolic measures; specifically, the prohibition of automatic rifles was a means of placating the public, whilst not affecting shooters by removing or limiting their access to firearms (Mortimer, 2020), with the intention of being seen to be doing something, as the perpetrator had used an AK47 assault rifle. Similarly, establishing the FCC to advise the government on firearms safety issues, may have been seen to be doing something, although as mentioned earlier, this was focused on safer shooting rather than gun control (Squires, 2021). As time passes sadness is replaced by an emotional fervour for change (Blackman and Baird, 2014, p. 1515). However, the more time that passes, the more pressure for change and calls for reform diminish, the media focus on other events pushing

stories of PMS from the front pages as memories of the event also begin to fade, society returns to the status quo and the shooting cycle has closed (Blackman and Baird, 2014, p. 1515).

The MSF can explain legislative change that occurred following Hungerford, however, this is not the case in all PMS, as can be seen in the case of Monkseaton.

4.2.3 Monkseaton 30th April 1989

The Problem Stream - Focusing Event

The Monkseaton shooting is the first example of a focusing event that did not influence policy change, it is therefore an example of a static case. This section explores the absence of the streams joining and considers why Monkseaton did not result in any amendments to the legislative framework.

In Monkseaton in 1989, the perpetrator, using his father's double-barrelled shotgun, went into the street shooting into houses, gardens, and cars. He killed one and wounded 14 others (Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), 1996; Kelly, 2012; Schildkraut and Elsass, 2016). Although, Mortimer (2020) suggests he injured 16, while Jenkins (1992) and Gresswell and Hollin (1994) mention 16 people and 17 victims respectively, although only one fatality; suggesting the perpetrator failed as a mass killer because 17 victims survived, despite his intention to kill (Gresswell and Hollin, 1994). The smaller the number of fatalities, the least noteworthy (Kelly, 2012; Lankford, 2016a), least important in terms of social consequence and the lower the likelihood it will be seen as an opportunity to push for reform, this minimises the importance of lower magnitude events (Scheithauer and Bondü, 2011).

Media attention was minimal following Monkseaton, there were only seven stories in the first 24 hours and 21 within the first four months, compared to almost 300 following Hungerford. When Monkseaton is featured there is often mention of Hungerford or Dunblane, or the perpetrator's obsession with Hungerford (The Independent, 1990; The Times, 1996). A lack of interest in the media was mirrored in parliament, only 11 mentions in Hansard debates between April 1989 and August 2022, and only five of which actually related to the shooting. There was

also very little written academically, with only three relevant publications identified out of 119 returned by Google Scholar.

The Monkseaton shooting is unlike other PMS included in this research. Within the neo-liberal group, it is notable for the perpetrator's arrest rather than suicide. He was charged with murder and attempted murder but was considered unfit to plead due to his mental ill health (Mortimer, 2020). Narratives focused on his mental ill health, the actions of a 'madmen' (The Independent, 1989), and it being impossible to legislate against a madman (Hurd MP, 1987; Wiggin MP, 1988), reinforcing the perception that such events are beyond legal intervention, because a madman cannot be stopped (North, 2011).

Policy Stream - Forming/Identifying Solutions

The mental health of firearms owners is germane to public safety (Mortimer, 2020). However, the fact that the perpetrator was not a registered firearm owner, and was illegally using his Father's firearm, appeared to negate certain concerns. Questions regarding firearms ownership were instead diverted towards debates around storage and access, and stricter regulation over deadly weapons, specifically shotguns, with the purpose of ensuring responsibility lay with those who own them to ensure they do not fall into the wrong hands, regardless of the inconvenience (Trotter MP, 1989).

Incidents involving the use of firearms reinforced the belief that the time had come to strengthen controls (Hurd MP, 1987). The law needed to be reviewed as the police had warned that such incidents could recur, and there was demand for changes and support for the suggested requirements/guidance related to shotgun licences and storage by the police and public (Trotter MP, 1989). A representative from the Police Federation argued that shotguns should be brought under the same regulations as other firearms and reiterated what had been argued previously, that the latest tragedy underlined the continuing threat from shotguns which new laws following Hungerford had not solved (The Times, 1989). Some who had previously defended measures to introduce more stringent controls after Hungerford later rejected calls for tougher shotgun restrictions. According to Shayma (1989), Hogg argued that the Firearms Act had already made a substantial change to the law by tightening the conditions under which people

could obtain and keep firearms and that both had been done in a comprehensive manner. It was argued that limiting access to firearms further would not only threaten the legitimacy of shooters (Waddington and Hamilton, 1997), but would also burden the police with unnecessary paperwork and associated demands on time and resources (Mortimer, 2020). However, focusing on financial costs risks undermining the significance of lives lost and the broader societal impacts, as discussed in Chapter 7.

Politics Stream - Engaging in Political Activities

Those in favour of the status quo faced little opposition from either the media or the public and instead found support from the gun lobby, which was often credited with playing a significant role in preventing the strengthening of regulations (Shayma, 1989). Following Hungerford, membership of BASC increased from 500 to 6,000, a rise that coincided with greater influence over government, potentially reinforced by the number of MPs joining BASC (BASC, 2010), and by the many ministers and MPS engaged in shooting activities. This dynamic echoed earlier instances in which laws went unenforced because they conflicted with prevailing social norms and the views of influential political and social groups (Acemoglu and Jackson, 2017). Against this backdrop, it is understandable why many maintained that existing controls were already sufficiently strict, and that it would be wrong to deprive farmers, sportsmen and target shooters of their weapons due to the actions of 'madmen' (Hurd MP, 1987). Moreover, it was argued that introducing new legislation would neither prevent another Hungerford nor improve relations between the shooting public and the police (Hurd MP, 1987).

Following Monkseaton Hurd MP (1988) confirmed that statutory safekeeping conditions would be imposed on shotguns from the 1st of July, with guidance on keeping those on domestic premises in a locked gun cabinet or secure container (Firearms Rules 1989, revoked). The introduction of safekeeping requirements was considered, not because a shotgun was used in a PMS, but that prior to both Hungerford and Monkseaton, there was a significant number of burglaries and thefts of shotguns (Earl of Caithness MP, 1986). Moreover, following the 1988 Act there was not one single reported case in which self-loading rifles had been used in any crime other than Hungerford (Greenwood, 2000). There is no escaping the fact that both Hungerford and Monkseaton involved firearms largely unaffected by

the changes introduced under the Firearms (Amendment) Act. Shotguns remain the most readily available and accessible firearm in the UK, which explains why opponents of reform argued that extending firearms certification to include shotguns would cause undue inconvenience for farmers, sportsmen and others who kept guns 'legitimately' for their own purposes (Hurd MP, 1988). While such measures might reduce the ease of access to shotguns, questions persisted about the effectiveness of legislation in preventing firearms from being stolen and misused (The Times, 1989).

Summary

Despite the presence of a focusing event, alterations in perceptions regarding the problem were unlikely to occur. Even if a policy window had been available, Monkseaton did not constitute a policy 'problem' that demanded a solution. Combined with limited political engagement, the opportunity to act passed; the status quo prevailed, life returned to normal, and the shooting cycle closed (Blackman and Baird, 2014, p. 1515). No legislative change followed the incident. Firearms law remained unchanged until 1991, when, in-line with the 1991 EC Weapons Directive, each EU Member State was required to amend its legislation accordingly (Home Office, 2018). A further amendment was introduced after the Dunblane shooting in 1996, which is discussed in the following section.

4.2.4 Dunblane 13th March 1996

The Problem Stream - Focusing Event

"Dunblane, 5 miles north of Stirling, will for many years to come be associated with the horrific massacre that took place in the primary school in 1996" (Lonely Planet Guide to Britain, 1999 from North, 2000)

The Dunblane shooting is an example of a focusing event that did influence agenda setting and led to policy change and is therefore an example of a catalytic case. This section will demonstrate how following the Dunblane shooting the three independent, and interdependent variables, the streams, interacted, producing the window of opportunity for agenda setting (Béland and Howlett, 2016). In March 1996 a member of a local gun club walked into a primary school armed with two handguns and killed 16 children and their teacher, injuring 17 more before killing himself (House of Commons, 1996a; Duwe, 2004). Not only did Dunblane meet

the requisite threshold in terms of victim fatality, but the victims were mostly children, a highly valued social group (Smith, 2006, p. 727), and Dunblane entered the collective memory of Great Britain as the most horrific shooting rampage (Thomson, Stancich and Dickson, 1998; Karp, 2003; Hurka, 2017).

However, prior to the shooting, following multiple incidents of concerning behaviour around children (for full discussion see North 2000), the Assistant Director of Education of Fife Regional Council wrote 'I feel that the events of 29 June 1992 in Dunblane in a sense serve as a warning ... I fear that a tragedy to a child or children is almost waiting to happen' (cited in North, 2000, p. 52)

In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, a group of concerned Scottish families, initially anonymous and unrelated to the victims' families, established the Snowdrop Appeal and launched a petition calling for the banning of all handguns (Macritchie, 1997). Nobody in the group had any knowledge of the political system or experience of lobbying (Thomson, Stancich and Dickson, 1998), nonetheless, the campaign gained momentum. Following its support by a number of the victims' families the Snowdrop Appeal became organically linked with the Dunblane shooting, both in the eyes of the public and the media (Thomson, Stancich and Dickson, 1998, p. 330).

Following Hungerford, the government response was not considered significant, instead there were suggestions that the government had given way to the gun lobby (Thomson, Stancich and Dickson, 1998; GCN, 2020). Hungerford had bought the issue of safer shooting to the fore, rather than public safety and the gun control debate, whilst Dunblane brought firearm control to the forefront of the political agenda for the first time (Squires, 2016). Additionally, North (2000) notes how Dunblane also raised questions about a number of important issues, including police operations, and emergency services. The Hungerford shooting resulted in concerned public debate and the Firearms Act that banned certain automatic weapons, Dunblane was the subject of international press coverage and the bipartisan response of the political leadership of the country and the gun lobby was just one of several features of the anguished public debate in Britain (Taylor, 1999, p. 121).

Whilst Hungerford had been called a one off (North, 2011) it was no longer possible for lobbyists to dismiss the unprecedented outrage that was prompted by another shooting, but this time with five-and six-year-old children as victims (Squires, 2021). Whilst there was now strong pressure for stricter firearms control from police representatives, the parents and the Snowdrop Campaign called for a ban on all firearms (Squires, 1997). Both Houses of Parliament resolved that a tribunal should be 'established for inquiring into a definite matter of urgent public importance' (Earl of Lindsey MP, 1996) and Lord Cullen was appointed to investigate the circumstances that lead to the shooting and make recommendations as appropriate (Home Office, 1996).

Policy Stream - Forming/Identifying Solutions

The inquiry failed to recommend a total ban on privately-owned handguns; however, it did recommend tighter controls with a view to safeguarding the public against the misuse of firearms (Cullen, 1996, p. 5, para.1.5). Similar to Hungerford, weaknesses in the police system were identified. The Office of Legislative Affairs (OLA, 2000, para.41) noted that the Dunblane shooting was carried out with authorised firearms due to an operational failure in assessing the perpetrator's suitability (discussed in Chapter 7). Additionally, Cullen found the reasons given in the perpetrator's application to own more than one handgun of the same calibre unsatisfactory, clearly indicating a case for revocation that should have been acted upon (Cullen, 1996, p. 6). This followed a similar decision in 1989 when the perpetrator inappropriately showed his firearms to a family (Pease and Pease, 1999).

The recommendations focused largely on the certification system, and within that the police and their responsibilities, such as carrying out enquiries regarding any change in circumstances. Additionally, powers to inspect registers and premises of approved clubs were extended to civilian licensing, to be authorised by the Chief Constable. It is suggested that many of the sections of Cullen's report rather than containing evidence, were proposals for changes to the existing firearms legislation based on an assumption that they would prove beneficial (Squires, 1997, p. 681).

Recommendations were made regarding what activities constitute 'good reason', Cullen (1996, p.100) suggested this should be a matter for discussion with the FCC, but that discretion should be exercised by the Chief Officer of police. Steps should also be taken to ensure police forces could hold and exchange information relating to individuals who held firearm certificates, and particularly those whose certificates had been refused, revoked or endorsed. In addition, those holding firearms certificates must be members of at least one approved club, with the certificate specifying which club. Furthermore, there was an expectation that the club would inform the police if that person ceased to be a member or did not attend for a period of a year. Cullen (1996, p.102) also wanted explicit statutory provisions for the setting out of this criterion in relation to the approval of clubs for the purpose of Section 15 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988.

Another suitability related recommendation suggested that language was revised within relevant sections of the Firearms Act to clarify conditions regarding the scope of 'fitness' to hold firearms and ammunition (Cullen, 1996, p.106). The counter-signatory requirement was to be replaced by two references and the provision of information about the applicants' medical history to be considered in consultation with professional bodies (Cullen, 1997, p.111). Many of the recommendations rather than highlighting the issue being the prevalence of the gun, instead suggested it is a question of identifying those deemed fit or not to possess firearms and essentially placed enormous emphasis on the police, gun clubs, GPs and other professionals (Taylor, 1999, p. 128).

Previously, Britain both considered itself and was regarded by others as a gun-free, civil society, in contrast to America (Nicholl, 1994). However, during a period of heightened public concern over what was thought to be a surge in the use of firearms during the 1990s, firearms crime increased by 500%, while the number of firearms certificate holders decreased by 20% (Kebbell, 1998). The increase in reports both locally and nationally in the press that focused on an ominous and relentless rise in the number of incidences reported to the police 'crystallised' concerns around firearm ownership (Taylor, 1999, p. 122).

Cullen (1996, p. 108) concluded that whilst illegal firearms were used in the majority of firearm-related crimes it was the existence of legal firearms that led to them being used in crimes. Firearms were more likely to be stolen or misused when kept in the homes of those holding individual firearms licences. In response to this, Cullen's report turned to the availability of subsection 1 firearms, handguns in particular, suggesting that the working of handguns could be restricted by partially dismantling the cylinder or fitting a lockable barrel block (Cullen, 1996, p.8). Alternatively, firearms could be stored at appropriately licensed and secured shooting clubs (Squires, 1997). Cullen concluded that should the other means not be adopted then the possession of such handguns by individual owners should be banned (Cullen, 1996).

The merits of the proposed range of firearm control policies were questioned (Squires, 1997). Many commentators argued that it was unlikely that any alterations in the regulation of legal firearms would actually have an impact upon the distribution and use of illegal firearms (Squires, 1997). Those who are likely to commit firearm-related crimes are already precluded from legally owning firearms as they have criminal records (Kebbell, 1998). Equally, the ability to implement any watertight systems for licensing or control were also questionable (Squires, 1997, p. 683). Arguments centred around the perpetrator's mental health with notions of lunacy and evil framing narratives around an individual issue rather than an issue with firearms ownership, as argued by Taylor (1999) mad men such as Hamilton and Ryan were unfit to hold a firearm licence. Those wanting to further restrict firearms as a result of it were otherwise sensible and well-informed people (Cottesloe MP, 1997), however, it is not considered possible nor necessary to ban everything that a lunatic could use to cause damage (Lord Gisborough MP, 1997).

Politics Stream - Engaging in Political Activities

"the devil came to Dunblane that day ... and he's still at work in the House of Commons" (John Crozier, father of Dunblane victim, Emma Crozier cited in Crawford and Lowrie, 1996)

The inquiry generated much interest, both in parliamentary debates but also within the media, moving the issue up the political agenda. Public attention closely tracks media coverage of issues (Kingdon, 1984; Hurka, 2017) as a result the media are

powerful agenda setters and thereby able to affect the public's opinion. There were 48 references to Dunblane in Hansard debates within 24 hours of the shooting, and 93 within the first four months, completely overshadowing Monkseaton and Hungerford. The interest seen within parliament was reflected in the media. Within the first 24 hours there were 168 media stories, and within the first four months this had risen to 2428, compared to 21 and 297 in Monkseaton and Hungerford respectively. Again, similar to Monkseaton and Hungerford headlines focused on a 'Mad and Evil Act' (Evening Standard, 1996) or the 'Dunblane Massacres' 'weird man interested in guns and boys' (The Guardian, 1996). Where there had been a lack of reporting in the media and debates in parliament reflected in a lack of academic interest previously, this was not the case with Dunblane. Within Google Scholar, the event was the subject of considerable discussion, with 86 academic articles published in the first nine months. Many of these focused on the firearms control debate, the perpetrator's mental ill health, and the broader arguments that lessons needed to be learned, and gun ownership curbed (The Guardian, 1996).

The Snowdrop Appeals' degree of politicisation grew while at the same time the pro-gun lobby engaged in a campaign of resistance against the passage of proposed legislation (Taylor, 1999, p. 120). Throughout the inquiry the British Sports Shooting Council (BSSC), acting as an umbrella body to represent the shooting communities' interests, opposed any restriction to the availability of handguns, rejecting every proposal that stopped short of a ban (Cullen, 1997, p.144, para.9.110). Cullen became frustrated with the entrenched attitude of the BSSC, as each measure was discredited at every turn the stakes were raised (Squires, 1997), with every restriction in dispute there was little to no incentive to see how anything short of a ban could be made to work (Cullen, 1996).

There was opposition in parliamentary debates that saw MPs come forward to assert their positions on the issue, this was reflected in support for arguments raised on both sides of the debate (Thomson, Stancich and Dickson, 1998). Those arguing for the status quo to be maintained faced significant opposition from the public and the media. The presence of a focusing event, the significance of which meant it could no longer be ignored, combined with considerable political

engagement and an open policy window presented the opportunity for reform. The existing condition, inefficient firearm controls responsible for PMS, was elevated to a problem (Hurka and Nebel, 2013, p. 392). The condition was perceived severe enough to demand political action, and an opportunity to push a cause had arisen. The Dunblane shooting had now become the focusing event that highlighted a need for reform.

Parliamentary debates called for politicians to 'accept responsibility for permitting an environment of such lax gun control' (House of Commons, 1996a) and acknowledge their failure following Hungerford to ensure the necessary controls were in place to significantly reduce the risk posed by firearms (House of Commons, 1996b). As the perpetrator was a fully licensed firearm owner any argument by the gun lobby was unlikely to be overturned, and as a matter of public safety the Conservative government were compelled to legislate against handguns, albeit reluctantly (Taylor, 1999, p. 123). The Firearms (Amendment) Act (1997) was passed in two instalments first by the outgoing Conservative government (Hurka and Nebel 2013, p.394), who banned handguns exceeding .22 calibre (Home Affairs Committee, 1996a). Although for many this fell short of a satisfactory response, particularly the parents, their friends and supporters.

Macritchie (1997) argued that lax firearms legislation means handguns fall into the wrong hands. Although the same arguments are not often made about shotguns, proposals to align shotgun and firearm licensing conditions have consistently faced strong opposition. This is despite the fact that legally owned shotguns have been used in PMS, including the Plymouth incident, and in all but one of the domestic shootings (see Section 4.2.6). Robertson MP (1996), argued that the only way to prevent another atrocity was to close any loopholes that could enable a mass shooting, suggesting that a full ban was the only effective means of reducing risk. While this proposal was supported by the Police Federation and Superintendents Association, it attracted significant criticism from Greenwood (2000), as discussed in Chapter 7.

Summary

Whilst the Conservative government had been reluctant to amend firearms legislation, following a landslide victory with 418 seats the incoming Labour

government (Cracknell, Uberoi and Burton, 2023) passed the Firearms (Amendment) (No.2) Act 1997 in February 1998. This banned private possession of all handguns including .22 calibre, with the exception of certain antique weapons (Squires, 2015). This proposal also met with resistance, with arguments centred on notions of respectability and on avoiding knee-jerk reactions amid concerns that handgun owners would feel betrayed by the rushed nature of the Bill (Peel MP, 1996). In contrast, Ann Pearston, who spearheaded the Snowdrop campaign, argued that anything less than a total ban implied that 'we and our children are expendable so target shooters can retain their right to pursue a sport that uses weapons designed to kill' (Travis, 1996) and clearly a child's right to life should override any individuals' right to own a firearm (Macritchie, 1997).

Similar to other impactful inquiries (Norris and Shephard, 2017) the Cullen inquiry eventually led to radically improved firearms legislation. The ban on handguns above .22 calibre, went beyond Cullen's specific recommendations. The extent to which these changes were a direct response to the inquiry versus a reaction to broader public and political pressure remains a subject of debate.

According to Kingdon's MSF, the likelihood of policy entrepreneurs succeeding increases when all three streams meet and are combined with the emergence of a political 'champion'. The Snowdrop Appeal had changed from a grassroots petition to an organised campaign (Taylor, 1999, p. 331). The aggressive tactics of those in the pro-gun lobby groups and the perceived inaction of government served only to give a platform on which Snowdrop could build their campaign (Thomson, Stancich and Dickson, 1998). When mainstream political parties align with the champion, the likelihood of change increases considerably if an election is forthcoming. Even in the presence of veto players who may initially oppose reform, electoral pressures can lead them to shift their positions (Boin *et al.*, 2009, p. 99; Hurka, 2017). In this case, the Dunblane shooting mobilised unprecedented public support for gun control (Thomson, Stancich and Dickson, 1998). The three streams merged, alternatives were suggested and then selected, and reform occurred and with it the shooting cycle closed (Blackman and Baird, 2014, p. 1515). Whilst all privately held handguns were prohibited following Dunblane,

firearm regulation was far from resolved, as demonstrated by the Cumbria PMS (Squires, 2000).

4.2.5 Cumbria 2nd June 2010

The Problem Stream - Focusing Event

The Cumbria PMS was the final event in Great Britain selected for inclusion. However, during the process of the research there was a further PMS in Plymouth in August 2021, discussed in the following section. Turning now to Cumbria, where the perpetrator shot first his twin brother, then his family lawyer and three fellow taxi drivers (Kelly, 2012). During the course of three hours, he drove 52 miles around Cumbria shooting somewhat indiscriminately before killing himself (Hurka, 2017). The Cumbrian constabulary only became aware of the incident two hours prior to the perpetrator taking his own life (Chesterman, 2011). A total of 12 people were killed and a further 11 were injured (Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC), 2010a; Duquet, 2016; Turner, 2017), although some sources reported 25 injured victims (McCarthy, 2010; Varma, 2010).

The perpetrator was granted a shotgun certificate in 1974, renewed up until his death. A firearms certificate was issued in 2007 (Chesterman, 2011, p.81). He lawfully owned a 20-gauge single barrelled shotgun, a 12-gauge Winchester and Fisher shotgun and a .22LR rim fire calibre bolt action rifle, and further ammunition within the scope of the licensing conditions (Chesterman, 2011, p.81). Whilst he legally possessed his weapons, he had sawn a section off the rifle's barrel prior to the shooting, rendering it illegal (Duquet, 2016, p.10).

To increase the likelihood of policy change there needs to be an event or events that highlight the need for reform. The shooting in Cumbria met the necessary conditions for it to be considered a PMS in terms of fatality threshold, and as such a higher magnitude event. However, it did not have any legislative consequences (Hurka, 2017) and there was very little discussion relating to the legal ownership and use of firearms, as a result opportunities to shape the debate were lost (Hillyard and Burrige, 2012). The Cumbrian PMS did not result in the requisite joining of the three streams necessary for policy change to occur, for this reason, the Cumbria shooting is another example of a static case.

Policy Stream - Forming/Identifying Solutions

The origin of policy change varies from one case to the next and a combination of factors are required for there to be policy change. In terms of policy analysis, one of the central questions is why certain ideas gain support, while others do not, is it the context in which they arise, the support they receive or how they move through the process? According to Kingdon's MSF, policymaking requires at the very least agenda setting, and viable alternatives. Within the policy stream, certain ideas and events are likely to gain popular support and then become part of the process of change. Focusing events such as Hungerford and Dunblane challenged the status quo triggering the political process (Emmenegger, 2010). Yet others lack the same support and contributory factors and instead policies remain stable, as was the case following the Cumbria massacre (Hurka, 2017, p. 164).

There are several factors that could have contributed to a lack of political movement. The existing regulatory framework in the UK was already considered some of the strictest globally (Hurka, 2017), even prior to the Firearms (Amendment) Act (1997). Consequently, some doubted it was possible to further strengthen legislation (Casciani, 2010). Whilst semi-automatic rifles and handguns had been prohibited, shotguns and hunting rifles were more readily available (Travis, 2010). Indeed, one of the weapons used in Cumbria was a shotgun, frequently considered less dangerous than handguns. The aforementioned factors, combined with a decrease in handgun offences from 1994 (Squires, 2000), could have contributed to the lack of support for change, despite there being very little information on the effectiveness of the policy measures introduced in 1997 (Squires, 2000).

The policy stream is populated by experts and analysts examining problems and proposing solutions (Kingdon, 1984), yet the Cumbria case resulted in inaction. Media commentary questioned whether the local constabulary had been aware of the risks posed by the perpetrator, and whether opportunities to prevent the PMS had been missed (Chesterman, 2011, p. 78). Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) Whiting was subsequently commissioned to review Cumbria Constabulary's firearms licensing procedures. His report concluded that there had been no reasonable opportunities for intervention within the licensing system that could

have prevented the shootings (Whiting, 2010a). Instead, the recommendations included: establishing formal links between GPs, mental health services, and the police; enabling professionals to alert police if concerns arose about certificate holders; requiring applicants to cover the cost of any medical reports; consulting applicants' families to confirm their suitability; and introducing a single type of certificate for both firearms and shotguns (National Police Chief's Council [NPCC], 2022).

ACPO's review of the Cumbrian constabulary's response highlighted operational issues between police and ambulance services (Overton, 2012). However, it concluded that the perpetrator's licences had been issued appropriately, and there were no opportunities to prevent the incident (Chesterman, 2011, p. 82-84). There were questions raised regarding health checks carried out by doctors, and how this is supervised afterwards (Lord Brett MP, 2010), but there was a lack of public, political or policing appetite for more gun control (Casciani, 2010). Debates focused on mandatory provision of medical certificates, echoing similar narratives following Hungerford, Monkseaton and Dunblane.

Although changes to national firearms licensing were recommended (Whiting, 2010a), guidance was updated rather than new laws enacted (Casciani, 2010). The Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC) recommended that rather than adding new rules and further confusing the already complex firearms legislation, the Government should provide proposals for early consultation on how to codify and simplify the law (HASC, 2010a). It was also recommended that media regulatory bodies consider enforcing a code of practice to prohibit 'overtly sensational media coverage of shootings' (HASC, 2010b, p. 5), to offer greater protection to the victims and their families. Additionally, experts were concerned that media reports appeared to encourage or inspire both copycat killings (Cantor *et al.* 1999; Romer, Jamieson and Jamieson, 2006; Larkin, 2007; HASC, 2010; Polen, 2014), where the behaviour of other mass shooters is imitated (Lankford, 2016b), and contagion effects, when behaviours appear to 'go viral' and spread like a disease, increasing the likelihood of their occurrence (Towers *et al.*, 2015; Dahmen, 2018; Lankford and Madfis, 2018).

As noted by Hurka (2017, p. 56) what really matters in agenda setting is not the objective size of the problem but the way the severity of the problem is perceived by societal actors. Following Cumbria, the focus remained on preventing mentally ill people from acquiring firearms, it was less about strengthening or regulating access to firearms. Firearms control was considered to prioritise protecting the rights of responsible firearms owners rather than protecting society (McNair-Wilson MP, 1987; Mischon MP, 1988). Debates in the media focused on the viability of mandatory provision of medical certificates. This narrow framing left little room to consider alternative causes of the events, and other policy implications were largely ignored (Hurka, 2017, p. 127). As a result, a window opened in the problem stream but not in the policy stream.

Politics Stream - Engaging in Political Activities

Following the shooting, political debates turned once again to firearms control, which according to the MSF should have increased the likelihood of policy change. Yet, as Hurka and Nebel (2013) note, an issue must be considered sufficiently severe by a range of actors to demand political action. Within Hansard, mentions of the Cumbria shooting overshadowed those of Hungerford and Monkseaton, but the incident did not generate as much interest as Dunblane, receiving only 29 mentions in the first 24 hours. This number later rose to 93 within four months, matching the level of attention given to Dunblane. Despite this slower initial response, the Cumbria case nevertheless prompted a House of Lords debate on 3rd of June, which examined the ACPO investigation into the perpetrators' access to firearms.

There are often multiple factors required to bring an idea to policy fruition (Kingdon, 1984), and if one of the elements is missing, the problems' place on the decision agenda is fleeting (Kingdon, 1984, p. 187). Reform agendas are instrumentally shaped by powerful actors, it is not just that issues reach the agenda, it is how these issues are then constructed or interpreted that result in attention being given to any issue (Birkland, 2007, p. 63). Experts, politicians and political parties are important and can have powerful effects on policy agendas and outcomes. Sometimes the recognition of a pressing problem is sufficient to gain a prominent place on the policy agenda, as was the case in Dunblane; equally, when combined with pressure group opposition this can move it further

down the list of priorities or off the agenda entirely (Kingdon, 1984). On this occasion, the gun lobby rushed to limit any possible review of firearm licensing (Lord Mackenzie MP, 2010). There was unequivocal opposition to 'knee-jerk legislation' (Morris, 2010). Prime Minister, David Cameron, stated that legislation would not stop such events taking place, and a review of the regulatory framework should only take place once the shooting had been investigated (Morris, 2010). Baroness Neville-Jones MP (2010) echoed Cameron's response regarding control measures, and the need to complete the investigations, rather than reacting without all of the facts.

There were 154 media stories in the first 24 hours, and 985 within the first four months, although 105 mentioned Raul Moat's shooting spree, which occurred shortly after Cumbria. Despite being only the third PMS in modern British history (Edwards, 2010) according to most definitions, the incident quickly reignited debates that drew parallels with Hungerford (McCarthy, 2010) and Dunblane, particularly in that the perpetrators were single, white, licenced firearms owners (Squires, 2010). Headlines largely focused on the events surrounding the rampage, with very little attention given to firearms legislation. The few exceptions included calls to clarify, simplify and overhaul legislation (Travis, 2010; Western Daily Press, 2010), government warnings against knee-jerk reactions (Meikle and Carter, 2010), and scrutiny of the Cumbrian Constabulary (Dodd, 2010). Unlike previous shootings, there was also very little reference to the perpetrator as the 'crazed taxi driver' (Varma, 2010).

The media and other actors play a crucial role in building support and shaping ideas. Media framing of PMS influences public perceptions of firearms violence and associated policy responses (Doran, 2014), and public attention closely follows media coverage (Hurka, 2017). In Cumbria, the focusing event generated attention but was not accompanied by a viable solution or alternative (Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016, p. 1). The absence of alternatives, limited support for legislative reform, and a government opposed to change collectively impeded policy development. Moreover, societal actors who might have kept the firearm issue on the public and political agenda lacked sufficient influence.

BASC (2010) reported that 2010 was a record year for recruitment to the gun lobby, with 250 out of 650 MPS expressing support for shooting, which gave the organisation significant political credibility (BASC, 2015). Cameron's personal enjoyment of country sports, although downplayed after becoming Conservative leader due to its association with an elite pastime (Cameron, 2019, p. 553; McCall, 2019), nonetheless aligned with the pro-gun status quo. By contrast, the earlier dissolution of the Snowdrop campaign meant there was no equivalent movement to that which had emerged after Dunblane, and despite its efforts, the GCN struggled to influence the political debate (Hurka, 2017). As a result, policy formation came to a standstill (Howlett, McConnell and Perl, 2015).

Similar to Monkseaton, the Cumbria shooting attracted limited public and media interest, and support for reform declined over time. Policy responses to Dunblane had already been implemented, and shotguns, as used in Cumbria, were not regarded by British society as being as dangerous as handguns (Hurka, 2017, p. 156). This reinforces the view that society tends to revert to the 'status quo' (Hurka, 2017). Consequently, opportunities to shape the debate were lost (Hillyard and Burridge, 2012, p. 1) and the shooting cycle was brought to a close.

Summary

Two separate issues became apparent following the review of licensing laws, whether there was political appetite for stricter firearm controls, and how effective monitoring and oversight mechanisms were. Although the UK's firearm controls are considered among the strictest globally, they did not prevent the four PMS already discussed, nor the Plymouth incident in 2021 (see Section 4.2.10). This raises the broader question of how access to firearms might be further restricted while still permitting their legal use for sporting and recreational purposes.

With the exception of Monkseaton, all PMS were carried out with legally owned firearms, often amid concerns about the perpetrator's suitability or the modification of weapons (e.g. additional firearms acquired in Hungerford, alterations made in Cumbria). With more effective monitoring and oversight, it is possible that 57 serious injuries and 46 fatalities might have been prevented. The debate should therefore move beyond the mechanics of licensing and monitoring to the more fundamental question of whether the acquisition and use of firearms can be

justified. In support of this position, Casciani (2010) argues that the only way to ensure absolute prevention of firearm-related murder is to prohibit anyone from acquiring or using a firearm. While some have suggested that incidents such as Cumbria were unavoidable (Whiting, 2010b; Hurka, 2017), others maintain that Cumbria, Dunblane, Hungerford, and more recently Plymouth were entirely preventable if firearms and ammunition had not been permitted in private homes (Squires, 2010).

4.2.6 And Here We Are...PMS in the Domestic/Private Sphere

The aforementioned events were selected as they met the inclusion criteria of a single episode PMS, although they were not the only firearms incidents that resulted in three victims with at least one fatality. However, rather than PMS, they were or at least started as domestic violence or intimate partner violence, where legally owned firearms were misused. When a firearm is present it increases the risk of multiple victims in a domestic setting (Kivisto and Porter, 2020). Tragedies with multiple shooting victims both in the UK and globally are frequently committed by men with legally held firearms (GCN, 2021a); 30% of domestic killings were perpetrated with legally owned firearms, mainly shotguns (Kebbell, 1998, p. 95). During the course of this research there have been several incidents which fall within a domestic/private setting where legally held firearms were misused (see Table 4:3 below and further information in [appendix 8](#)).

Table 4:3 Domestic/Private Mass Shootings
(Authors own data)

* Also killed his mother and sister

** PC Rathband took his own life 18 months after the attack

This section examines how these incidents have shaped debates about the risks associated with legally owned firearms. It considers the impact of strengthening legislation and improving applicant suitability assessments on reducing the

incidence of PMS (Gold, 2020). As with the case studies, the perpetrator is not named here, although their details are provided in Table 4:4.

Within a month of the Cumbria shooting, on the 1st of July 2010 in Northumbria, the perpetrator, armed with a sawn-off shotgun, killed his ex-partners' boyfriend and injured her, before shooting and injuring a police officer in East Denton the following day, around 20 miles away. A highly publicised week-long manhunt culminated in a six-hour police stand-off (Rowe, 2013), before he shot himself.

Two years earlier, in Shropshire in 2008, Jill Foster's husband used one of several legally owned shotguns to kill her and their daughter Kirstie, along with all their horses and dogs, before setting the family home on fire and killing himself (Ronson, 2008). However, it was the Northumbria shooting, occurring so soon after Cumbria, that brought the dangers of firearms back to the forefront of public attention, particularly because it too was carried out with legally owned weapons (HASC, 2010a).

Following the ACPO investigation into Cumbria amidst concern regarding the wider issues posed by the shootings, the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC, 2010b) announced their intention to investigate the issues surrounding the use of legal firearms in criminal activity, and in particular the extent to which current firearms legislation was fit for purpose; proposals for the process of information sharing between the police and medics in respect of firearm licensing and renewals; and also the sharing of information between police and prisons to assess the risk of offenders who may have access to firearms; and finally to consider the legislation relating to and dangers associated with air weapons (HASC, 2010a).

During the investigation oral evidence and written submissions were presented from witnesses from Cumbria, related interest groups and organisations, in addition to those who participate in shooting as a pastime or whose livelihoods depend on it (Squires, 2014b). It was found that the perpetrator had little contact with his GP and mental health services and consequently, there was a lack of opportunity to review his licences (Whiting, 2010a). Although, there were several

occasions where his licenses could have been revoked by Cumbria police. The first in 1982 following a conviction for drink driving; a suspended sentence for theft and handling stolen goods in 1988; an incident with his girlfriend that came to the attention of the police in 1990, and allegations of demanding money with menaces in 1999 (HASC, 2010b). If his sentence had not been suspended in 1982, he would have been a prohibited person under the Firearms Act and as such would have been ineligible for a licence for five years following his release (Whiting, 2010b). Although, this period would have lapsed 15 years before 2010 (Turner, 2017) and the PMS, it would have nonetheless been a specific consideration in the decision-making process when looking to grant or renew a licence (Whiting, 2010b). Similar to Dunblane, there was information that should have alerted the licensing officers: allegations of grudges with family and friends, financial concerns and mental instability, yet there were no questions regarding his firearms ownership entitlement, and he managed to retain his licenses (Squires, 2014a, p. 96). During the investigation it was argued that in each of these incidents his firearms suitability was reviewed and fell within the guidelines, and as such it was a case of tightening up those guidelines (Mackey, 2010).

4.2.7 A System Problem?

Issues in the efficacy of the system became evident when a series of individual cases involving firearms were investigated by the IPCC (HASC, 2010). There was considerable information regarding the behaviour of license holders that should have alerted the licensing officer (Furniss, HASC, 2010, p. 26). For example, the investigation into the Shropshire perpetrator revealed he had previously shared suicidal thoughts with his GP (HASC, 2010, p.28). It was agreed between ACPO and the British Medical Association (BMA) that police would alert GPs to every new and renewal licence application, but the police would take responsibility for granting or renewing a license (HASC, 2010).

Concerns were raised from various parties, regarding the ability of GPs to judge fitness to possess a weapon or predict future behaviour, and the BMA argued that the best indicator of future behaviour continues to be prior behaviour (HASC, 2010). Similar arguments resurfaced following Plymouth (discussed in Section 4.2.9). Whiting (2010a) found that the forces' decision and subsequent actions in

Cumbria regarding the grant and renewal of the perpetrator's shotgun certificate were 'in accordance with the law, regulation, Home Office advice and ACPO policy' and as such were reasonable in the circumstances (Turner, 2017, p. 4).

Whiting (2010b) concluded that the licensing system in Cumbria was properly operated and whilst there may not have been any clear opportunities to improve the system, several wider recommendations although not directly linked to that case, might improve domestic firearm security and licensing. For example, exchanges between health authorities and the police, more extensive enquiries into the suitability of the applicant, in particular in respect of domestic violence and adopting a single licence system for shotguns and other firearms and as such simplifying the licence procedure (Whiting, 2010a). It was also suggested that there was scope for adjustments to the licensing process to minimise risk, a need to look at how the law can be tightened (HASC, 2010) although more effective measures could be put in place to tackle criminal use of those firearms not subject to licensing regimes.

Whiting (2010, para. 3.6) argued that the firearms licensing system is designed to reduce the risk of lawfully possessed firearms being misused criminally, not to completely eliminate it. A view shared by Mackey (2010) who also stated that the licensing system can only reduce risk. To eliminate the risk there would have to be a completely and fundamentally different relationship with firearms, it is not a matter of simple changes to the licensing system (HASC, 2011, ACPO firearms and Explosives Licensing Working Group (ACPO FELWG) Evidence 105 1.3). Compulsory medical checks were quickly ruled out as resource intensive and disproportionate, and lacking any firm evidence to support this would achieve the desired level of certainty (HASC, 2010, p.31). Equally, proposals to tighten restrictions/clearer guidance relating to those who have engaged in criminal activity was not considered appropriate, as those who are convicted and receive a custodial sentence should not be allowed to possess firearms (HASC, 2010).

Mackey (2010) argued that the issue about prohibited persons and suspended sentences were an opportunity to clear up a whole range of things that minimise the risk of a future event. Whiting is a certificate holder who collects antique

firearms, and as a member of a re-enactment/living history group is considered very knowledgeable about firearms, leading Harriman (2010) to suggest his experience lends weight to his report. Whiting advocated bringing back the FCC the 'independent' expert group the shooting lobby had once hoped to regulate themselves through (Squires, 2014a). It is perhaps in light of this that Whiting's Report, despite being detailed was considered 'conservative and somewhat parochial' (Squires, 2014a, p. 96).

4.2.8 Money Matters

The GCN proposed the renewal period be reduced to two years, in support of this North (2011, p. 35) argued that there had been several instances of individuals' behaviour changing over a short period of time. In response Whiting agreed that more frequent inspection checks would offer greater assurances although it was nonetheless difficult to quantify that benefit (HASC, 2011, para. 77). The Select Committee argued that there was no evidence of an increase in firearm misuse since the period was increased from three years in 1995 and changing the period to two years would place additional burden on police resources (HASC, 2011, p. 35).

However, this burden could be adjusted if the full cost of a licence was met by the licence holder, the revenue this would generate would provide significant resources to be able to meet this additional need. Currently it is the responsibility of police forces issuing shotgun certificates and there had not been a change for 13 years, a proposed increase was put forward in 2013 that would recover 50% of the cost of the current cost of the manual system of fee administration, but this was blocked by the new Cabinet sub-committee 'Reducing Regulation Committee' as it did not represent value for money for firearm holders (Home Office, 2014). As the only people who stand to gain from the resistance to the change are shooters their lobbying has been successful once again (GCN, 2021c). Effectively preventing changes that have the potential to minimise the risk of legal firearms being misused because the focus is on their hobbies rather than public safety. In 2014 the fees were still only recouping 27% of the actual cost of processing an application, after working with key partners, shooting organisations and the police

there was a revision of the fees that saw an increase from £50 to £79.50 for a shotgun certificate and £88 for a firearms certificate (Home Office, 2014).

Following Plymouth, the Coroner expressed concern that the current licensing fees still do not allow the police to fully recover the cost (Home Office, 2023a). A shotgun certificate now costs £194 and a firearm certificate £198, both valid for five years, with renewal costs of £126 and £131 respectively yet the actual cost to process each certification remains as high as £520 (Morris, 2023). Costs are typically passed on to society and taxpayers, emphasising the economic cost of firearms violence (Rhee *et al.*, 2016). GCN and advocates argue that currently the system is unfairly subsidising shooters and their hobbies at the expense of public safety, as argued by Squires (2022) it is 'perverse that the general public should subsidise people's shooting hobbies', more so given it depletes the police's resources and ability to effectively do their job. With over 800,000 licences in existence, the cost to the taxpayer is approximately £20 million a year, therefore issuing a two year rather than five-year licence would not only be economically more practical it would also help to ensure that those who were in possession of firearms, and importantly their suitability, were regularly assessed. If both application and renewal fees were sufficient to recover the full cost, to licence 800,000 firearm owners a year would be £96 million (£120 x 800,000) this would ensure a more robust licensing system could be enacted (GCN, 2021b). Instead, it was considered that the most effective way forward was a more proactive approach to licence revocation following the Cumbria shooting, with emphasis on the process of policy scrutiny and decision-making in relation to firearms licensing (HASC, 2010, p. 35). There were again concerns raised in relation to the impact of police spending cuts on firearms licensing, an issue that has resurfaced recently following the pandemic and further delays to the system.

According to the Home Office (2011) firearms controls in the UK have an indirect and positive impact on the number of guns in criminal hands. Whiting's conclusions that there were no reasonable opportunities where the licensing system could have intervened and prevented any of the incidents was reassuring (Home Office, 2011). Other than suggesting they will closely monitor new arrangements for police to alert GPs to any new and renewal license applications;

and carry out further work to assess practicalities for implementing changes regarding prohibited persons, it was not considered necessary to extend the prohibited person provision of Section 21 (Home Office, 2011), the Government response to the HASC report was largely, to keep things under review. Published in December 2010, the HASC report focused on the use of legal firearms in domestic incidents, often linked to domestic violence due to firearms being stored at home. Evidence given by both Whiting and Mackey (HASC, 2010, Evidence 37-38) argued that existing firearms laws had been appropriately applied and only far more fundamental changes on private ownership could have prevented Cumbria's rampage. Both officers sought to 'bracket off the fundamental question of the private ownership of firearms' (Squires, 2014a, p. 96). According to the HASC (2010) well-designed legislation regulates and restricts the supply of firearms and as such can reduce firearms crime, in support there was again reference to the UK's strict legislation and comparatively low levels of gun crime.

4.2.9 Another 'One-off' Shooting with Legally Owned Firearms

Nonetheless, in Horden in 2012 Susan McGoldrick, her sister Alison Turnbull and her daughter Tanya were shot and killed by Susan's former partner, who despite a history of domestic violence owned six weapons, including three shotguns (Turner, 2017). His firearms had previously been confiscated following a domestic incident, yet they were returned six weeks later, despite receiving a final written warning from Durham Police (Brown, 2012). His shotgun licence renewal was recommended for refusal following accusations of domestic violence and alcohol misuse, although this was later overturned by senior officers (Shooting UK, 2012).

The case was referred to the IPCC, and the investigation uncovered a 'reprehensible lack of intrusive inquiries' and poor practices reflective of woeful record keeping, and a lack of adequate systems and safeguards (Turner, 2017, p. 19). A complete picture of his history as a perpetrator of domestic violence should have alerted police to a pattern of behaviour requiring far greater scrutiny (IPCC, 2012). Had more robust procedures been in place at the gun licencing unit the three victims would still be alive (Dickinson, 2022).

The relatively dormant debate about the risks associated with legally owned firearms in domestic contexts was reignited. Bobby, Participant 10 lost his mother,

aunt and sister during the Horden shooting, and commented how despite some of the worlds' strongest firearms legislation, licensing is failing (discussed in full in Chapter 7). Concerns were evidently overlooked. The perpetrator's application suggested that he abstained from drinking, yet there had been interactions with the police where he had been intoxicated, and he had received a caution following a domestic incident. The shooting did result in a review of the firearms licensing system, including a change in the procedure to reduce the risk of granting licences to potentially unsuitable people, although no legislative changes (Dickinson, 2022).

The IPCC (2012) report emphasised the lack of clarity in the process for shotgun licence applications, in particular where there were questions regarding the suitability of licence holders, noting a lack of consultation with partners and family members where domestic violence had been a factor. Recommendations included a revision of current legislation and guidance to allow for a single uniform test for applicant suitability and fitness; mandatory home visit and enquiries with GPs, and enhanced monitoring through both police and health databases (IPCC, 2012). The IPCC also supported the HAC (2010a) recommendation that all cautions, bind overs and fixed-penalty notices should be disclosed, and health checks by doctors should be revised. However, the response to the Cumbria shooting was to update and revise guidance, yet these measures did nothing to prevent the shooting in Horden.

In a 2015 report HMIC warned of the danger of more tragedies due to the fundamental gaps in licensing practices. There were concerns about backlogs, with certificates expiring prior to the renewal being approved, a continued absence of training for staff, unsatisfactory arrangements for assessing the medical suitability of applicants, and governance arrangements were considered inadequate, with 3 of the 11 forces inspected not meeting the required monitoring and audit arrangements (HMIC, 2015, p. 5). The report identified three areas that could improve licensing arrangements, including simplifying the licensing process through digitisation, independent scrutiny of licensing decisions, and enhancing firearms guidance (HMIC, 2015). Arguments around how shootings of this nature are very rare in the UK (Malthouse MP, 2022; Patel MP, 2021) accompany those that warn against knee-jerk responses to 'one off' events and have been

prominent following each PMS incident in the UK, and yet another incident with a legally owned firearm occurred in 2021.

4.2.10 Yet Another ‘One-off’ Shooting

“if any lessons had been learned in the aftermath of earlier tragedies, they have been forgotten and that learning has been lost” (Arrow, 2023, p. 5)

On 12th August 2021 in Plymouth five people were shot and killed, including the perpetrator’s mother, and a three-year-old girl; two others were injured before he shot himself with a legally held shotgun (see Table 4:4). The perpetrator was granted a licence for clay pigeon shooting in July 2017 (Evans, 2021) and a pump-action shotgun in 2018, despite a history of violence and mental health issues. His firearm was removed in December 2020 following an assault (IOPC, 2021a). However, once he had participated in the Pathfinder scheme, a ‘contract’ to reduce harm and reoffending, and attended a mandatory anger management course (Bancroft, Mathers and Tidman, 2021) it was returned in July 2021 (Evans, 2021). Clearly this had been a wholly inadequate provision to reduce future offending (Arrow, 2023).

The interest of the public and firearms owners is best served with an effective system to assess the medical suitability of firearms applicants’ (BMA, Home Office, NPCC, 2019). Information sharing processes between GPs and police were introduced in 2016 (Home Office, 2021), however, the responsibility lay with the applicant to arrange for information on their medical suitability to be provided by their GP to the licensing department dealing with their application (BMA, 2023). Consequently, Devon and Cornwall police, influenced by legal precedent following a previous refusal being overturned in court, believed they were not able to refuse an application (IOPC, 2021b). Despite a 2019 memorandum stating that the legal responsibility for monitoring firearms holders’ rests with the police, with doctors occupying a supporting role (BMA, Home Office, NPCC, 2019).

The circumstances surrounding the perpetrator’s case shared similarities with other PMS, all except Monkseaton were perpetrated with legally owned firearms. The perpetrator was linked to online terrorist propaganda, hate speech, and incel ideologies, prompting widespread debate about misogyny, terrorism and the role

of firearms in such events (Correia and Sadok, 2021; Hardy, Gardner and Lyons 2021). However, firearms access and licensing issues appeared to be missing from the discussion, at least initially.

Soon after, however, attention shifted to the fact that yet another shooting had been carried out with legally owned firearms, reigniting concerns about licensing regimes and police oversight. The process of firearms licensing is a public service to ensure public safety (Harriman, 2022) and individual forces are responsible for issuing certificates. However, this can only happen after extensive background checks have been completed by a team of experts, and the individual meets the Home Office national legislation criteria (NPCC, 2021).

Devon and Cornwall's compliance with firearms licensing guidance was subject to an independent PEER review and a review by the IOPC. The investigation examined the rationale behind the decision-making and also police contact with the perpetrator prior to the incident (IOPC, 2021a), to establish if appropriate steps were taken to seize the shotgun, certificate and ammunition (Evans, 2021), but also regarding the sharing of information about the assault with the Firearms and Explosives Licensing Department.

Two officers received disciplinary notices for returning the perpetrator's firearm after the assault (IOPC, 2021b). An additional investigation focused on his firearms licensing history, medical records and his engagement with the Pathfinder scheme (IOPC, 2021b). In response to concerns about licensing regimes and how this is overseen, the Secretary of State asked all forces to urgently review their licensing practices and assess if they need to revisit any existing licences. Despite yet another PMS perpetrated with a legally owned firearm the Secretary of State suggested that the outcomes provided reassurance that the police have a robust process for issuing and reviewing firearms and shotguns licences in place (Patel MP, 2021).

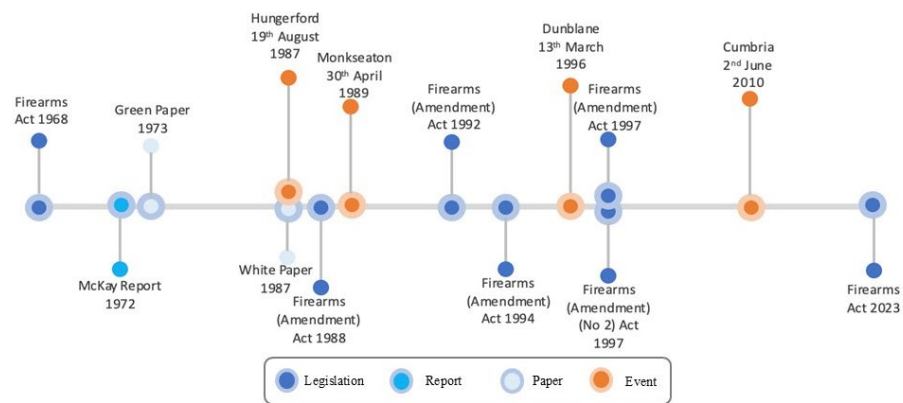


Figure 4:3 Timeline of PMS and Firearms Policy
(Authors own image)

4.2.11 Summary

To completely eliminate the risks posed by firearms requires a fundamental change in attitudes towards firearm ownership and a very different approach from parliament (Whiting, 2010a). Some suggest that claims of the strictest firearm legislation and low levels of gun crime (Patel MP, 2021; House of Commons, 2000), successfully demonstrate the licensing regime's ability to assess an applicants' fitness (HASC, 2010a, p. 20). However, Excluding Monkseaton and Northumbria, the aforementioned PMS and domestic incidents were perpetrated with legally owned firearms, where prior concerns should have resulted in the perpetrator losing their license. There are also still misgivings about the types of firearms that can be lawfully possessed (Cooper, 2011), see Table 4:4 below for details of the firearms used during the PMS, and [appendix 11](#) for the classifications of firearms.

Table 4:4 List of Firearms and Public Mass Shootings
(Authors own data)

The police resource limitations and firearms licensing remaining low on their agenda increases the risk of further tragedies (GCN, 2021a). With both sides of the debate agreeing that the system is under-resourced, improperly integrated and unable to flag potential problems, and the broken licensing scheme risks yet another Plymouth type event (GCN, 2021b; BASC, 2022).

Proponents of firearm ownership argue that legal firearms owners are responsible, reliable and law-abiding members of communities (GCN, 2021a). Whilst this may be true, the greater the number of firearms in circulation the greater the potential for yet another PMS, particularly when combined with factors such as a history of violence. If incidents such as Hungerford and Dunblane are so rare that they form a poor basis of legislation (Gisborough MP, 1997), then incidents such as Monkseaton are unlikely to generate sufficient interest to see change occur.

Furthermore, as argued by OLA (2000) extending the system further will not produce a better one but weaken a poor one. This raises questions regarding the efficacy of stricter controls or system expansion as solutions. These theoretical concerns were soon reinforced by practical challenges in implementation. New statutory guidance combined with Covid-19 restrictions and a peak in licence renewals caused mass disruption across licensing departments in England and Wales (BASC, 2022). Leading to many forces suspending grant applications, consequently, some certificate holders could be holding firearms illegally. Forces might not have been able to mitigate for the disruption caused by the pandemic, however, Harriman (2022) argues that they should have been prepared for peak renewals and the introduction of medical verifications.

With a more robust licensing system and stronger police forces some of the tragedies could have been prevented (GCN, 2021a). Public safety should be prioritised over the convenience of shooters, and licence fees should be increased to an appropriate level (GCN, 2021b). Additionally, if it is impossible to predict who may become unstable and commit atrocities with a gun then reducing the number of guns in circulation is critical (GCN, 2021a).

PMS in Great Britain, and the MSF factors that contributed to legislative change in catalytic cases have been explored. The next section will consider PMS that occurred in Germany, the first of the Conservative Corporatism countries.

4.3 Conservative Corporatism

Corporatism refers to how policymaking is influenced by organisations and interest groups (Götz, 2019). It can be defined as a form of interest representation that rivals other means of group politics (Wilson, 1983), such as the traditional pluralist view of interest groups that sees multiple groups compete against each other within the policy process, to represent the same social interests (Dalton, 2014). This competition ensures no one group is able to exert a dominant influence over the policy process within Government, and the success of the groups influence is entirely dependent upon the support they are able to mobilise (Dalton, 2014). Conservative corporatism is a response to liberal pluralism and Marxist radicalism; it is based upon the normative value of conservatism and the structural layout of

corporatism and there are many competing views regarding corporatism (Wilson, 1983). Traditionally, corporatism describes the overall type of political system as an alternative to democracy or monarchy (Wilson, 1983). Citizens delegate their participatory rights to the leaders of established and centralised groups, where corporatist forms of interest may coexist with pluralist forms of policymaking (Wilson, 1983, p. 106). Symbolised by a high degree of collaboration among organised and centralised groups in the shaping and implementing of public policy (Wilson, 1983, p. 108). It is a specific socio-political process where organisations engage with state agencies to shape public policy, combining interest representation and policy implementation (Cawson, 1986, p. 38). At the political centre it is the conservative version of corporatism, which according to Häkkinen (2020, p. 248) refers to an idea of society as a social body divided into functional organs with legal personhood. Pluralist interest representation is mixed with corporatist policy formation and vice versa and supposedly explains interest representation and public participation in politics and the policymaking process (Wilson, 1983). This leads some to interpret corporatism as a 'species of textbook pluralist society' (Sabel, 1981, p. 209).

Within conservative corporatist states there is often a different culture and attitude that is more inclusionary with a focus on rehabilitation and re-socialisation (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006a, p. 448). The overall philosophy and ethos are communitarian, seeking to integrate and include all citizens (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006b). Central to this is the relationship between the individual and the nation state, mediated by interest groups and other social organisations (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006b, p. 17). A defining feature of corporatism is the formal representation of such functional interests (Cawson, 1978). Here, unlike neo-liberalism, key national interest groups are integrated with the national state and furthermore, are granted a degree of control over those they represent, although this must be in-line with consensual constructions of 'national interest' (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006a, p. 443). The typical form of conservative corporatism within Europe has been Christian democracy, based upon moral values it relies heavily on traditional institutions such as the family, and a typical feature of corporatist states is the strong support or reliance upon traditional institutions such as churches (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006b). In place of a fluid, competitive system of

interest representation corporatism signifies a system of interest group politics that is highly structured and institutionalised (Dalton, 2014).

Interest groups speak for a distinct clientele with a common viewpoint, ensuring the views of the members are expressed more clearly (Dalton, 2014). A group's organisational structure provides both the political and administrative expertise necessary to monitor government activities and lobby policymakers successfully (Dalton, 2014). Interest groups provide a more focused method of interest articulation and are able to express their members' views in terms that political elites are more likely to understand. In Germany, interest groups are even more central to the policy process than they are in the USA, the majority of the population belongs to at least one voluntary organisation and many of these involve social and leisure activities (Dalton, 2014). Sports and rifle clubs have large national memberships with an organisational structure that enables them to participate in the policy process, meaning they are able to mobilise for political action, although unlike the NRA they are often apolitical (Dalton, 2014), yet the organisational structure of those politically active interest groups enable their participation in the policy process. The firearms lobby wields considerable power in Germany, the numbers of both sports shooters and hunters is significant enough to ensure conservative-learning parties keep their interests in mind (Elder, 2022).

Germany is counted amongst those countries which experience a limited pluralism with strong status groups holding an oligopolistic position (Von Beyme, 1998, p. 51). The firearm industry is one example of an oligopolistic marketplace, in the sense that the firearms manufacturing sector is comprised of a lot of money in very few hands (Eitches, 2018, p. 32). Often the largest and most important status groups dominate the scene of interest representation more than the parliamentary decisionmakers and this is often accompanied by agitation in the media and with the public (Von Beyme, 1998 p. 52). The parliamentary process is also predominantly organised as a form of limited pluralism, at least in the sense of oligopolistic arenas (Von Beyme, 1998, p. 53). The arms lobby has privileged access to those within government, and they use a plethora of lobbying strategies, one of which involves bringing together influential politicians and high-level

industry representatives in lobby associations known as 'structures' (Valeske, 2022). The most politically influential interest groups combine a developed organisational base and a particular interest in policy questions (Dalton, 2014).

Conservative corporatist states such as Germany are positioned in the middle of neo-liberal and social democratic states in terms of their policies (Tonry, 2009). The 'neo' qualifier is often added to the corporatist label to denote the interest group structure in a more moderate form (Dalton, 2014). The neo-corporatist model is followed by Germany both in their method of organising interests and the pattern of policy formulation (Dalton, 2014). To bring the industry closer to representing perfect competition requires outside influences to permeate the market in order to achieve more efficient outcomes. Centre left politicians in Germany and elsewhere have been known to replicate New Labour and the UK and in particular Tony Blair's 'tough on crime tough on the causes of crime' approach (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006b, p. 439). However, one of the key characteristic attributes of the conservative regime is an inherent resistance to change, and conservative welfare regimes tend to adapt slowly and incrementally (Matznetter, 2002, p. 275). National legislative procedures and institutions shape individual beliefs about how people are and to which communities they belong (Zahariadis, 2016, p. 6); identities help to explain popular support under certain conditions for greater firearms control, or less, for example. The resistance to change that is inherent in conservative welfare regimes not only results in adaptations that occur incrementally, as seen in both the Erfurt and Winnenden PMS, discussed in Section 4.3.4, but are slow to adapt.

Conservative corporatism is exemplified by Germany, but this grouping also includes Belgium (Matznetter, 2002) and France, although more recently Switzerland is included in Hough, Jackson and Bradfords' (2013) analysis. However, given the time and word constraints, only Germany and Belgium will be explored in this research. The next section will begin with a brief overview of the history of firearms control and legislation in Germany and will be followed with an analysis of the PMS using the MSF.

4.3.1 Germany History of Firearms Ownership and Control

Germany, similar to many European countries has a long history of civilian firearm ownership, with keen cultural interests in hunting and sports shooting (Karp, 2003, p. 51). Whilst marksmen and enthusiastic hunters make up the bulk of firearm owners, thousands of sports shooters pursue their hobby in tradition-laced clubs (Smale, 2015), and it is sports and target shooting that is cited as the most common reason for civilian firearms possession in Germany (European Commission, 2019).

Germany has the largest number of privately owned firearms of all the case studies, with 26 million privately owned firearms they are eighth highest in the world firearms ranking, and their rate of registered firearms per 100 civilians is 5.95 (Alpers, 2022). There are in excess of five million registered firearms in Germany, although only 946,546 licensed owners were entered on the National Weapons Register (NWR) (Magill, 2022). There are a number of factors that could explain this anomaly. Old firearms remain in circulation following the previous wars and appear in high-profile incidents, thus contributing to the difficulty in measuring the number of weapons in circulation (Magill, 2022). In addition, the consolidation of federal German firearm control polices in the 1970s resulted in a number of firearms disappearing from official records when owners failed to register them (Squires, 2014a, p. 282). This is further compounded by German reunification and illegal weapon trafficking and a thriving black market that contributes further to the illegal weapon inventory (Squires, 2014b). As a result, it is estimated that an additional 20 million firearms are illegally owned, equating to roughly 30 guns for every 100 people in a population exceeding 80 million (German Culture, 2022) (see Table 4:5). However, despite high levels of ownership, they have one of the lowest rates of firearm-related deaths (Alpers, 2022).

Table 4:5 Country Population and Size
(Sources: Small Arms Survey, 2024; Statista, 2024)

Germany has a complex and extensive history of civilian firearm control (Hurka, 2017). Firearms are regulated by the Ministry of the Interior, the Federal States and the European Commission (Alpers, 2022). During the German revolutions of 1848-49 the German Nationalist movement were hoping to adopt a militia system that followed the Swiss role model, where the militia system is a central tenet of the country's political culture (Roca, 2019), although the requests failed. Prior to the 1900s there were so few instances of firearms violence that a legislative approach to restricting the right to bear arms was not considered legitimate (Ellerbrock, 2011, p. 200). Consequently, the regulation of firearm ownership and use was considered unnecessary and contrary to civil liberties (Ellerbrock, 2011, p. 201).

By 1910 modern firearms were widespread in Germany (Ellerbrock, 2011, p. 194). The cultural embedding of weapons was the main reason for the wide circulation of firearms, and whilst there were still many districts where knives were commonplace, there was a change that saw firearms take the lead. Firearms became linked to cultural concepts such as manliness, honour, power and respect (Dickhoff, 2005). Instances of firearm violence were increasing in every German city, indicating a significant issue that resulted in a fundamental shift. The Interior, Justice and Trade ministries had to deviate from the previous view regarding firearm control and instead demonstrated support for the legal control of firearms (Hurka, 2017). The first draft of firearm legislation was formulated in 1910, although in 1914 the process was interrupted by World War I (1914-1918) and when the process resumed in 1919 it was an entirely different political context

(Dickhoff, 2005). This had a major influence on the drafting of the Firearms and Ammunition Act in April 1938.

The war led to shortages of supplies, manpower and food that saw over 700,000 Germans die of starvation during 1916-1917 and despite predictions of early victory, the war continued for two more years (Dalton, 2014). Democratic reforms were thwarted by an authoritarian state and almost three million soldiers and civilians lost their lives, the governments' inability to govern led to its collapse (Dalton, 2014). The new democratic system of the Weimar Republic was established by a popularly elected constitutional assembly that tried to address some of the structural problems: it guaranteed basic citizens' rights, lessened the political influence of the state governments, and political parties became legitimate actors in the political process (Dalton, 2014). It also saw the politicisation of firearm violence (Ellerbrock, 2003) and once 'in the arena of political attention', firearm violence remained a subject that triggered control efforts (Ellerbrock, 2011, p. 208). The Weimar Republic, in an attempt to stabilise the country and comply with the Versailles Treaty passed strict firearm control laws that banned all firearm ownership (Harcourt, 2004, p. 673). However, before the Treaty was signed, legislation was enacted by the German Parliament prohibiting firearm possession, and this was swiftly followed by legislation requiring the surrender of all firearms to the government (Harcourt, 2004, p. 673). This had a significant influence on the subsequent drafting of the Firearms and Ammunition Act (1938). German arms trade faced particularly challenging economic situations as a result of the regulations of the Versailles Treaty which dictated that the remaining freedom of movement was further restricted (Dickhoff, 2005).

Following World War I private firearm ownership was considered a threat to political order and in an attempt to ensure stability a national gun law was passed in 1938 (Ellerbrock, 2011). The Reich Law on Firearms and Ammunition (1928) included many elements that are familiar today; regulation of the manufacture and sale of firearms; licensing and the introduction of certificates, age limits and eligibility validation (Ellerbrock, 2011, p. 208). The regulations foreshadowed Hitler's rise to power, and it is argued that they were enacted to prevent armed insurrection (Harcourt, 2012, p. 673). Further significant changes occurred in 1933

when Hitler and the National Socialists German Worker's Party (NSDAP) took power (Dickhoff, 2005). With the revision of the constitution and the end of the democratic era the Weimer Republic was replaced by the Third Reich (Dalton, 2014).

The post-World War I period to the inception of World War II saw firearm control decline rather than increase (Harcourt, 2004). Whilst the Nazi regime had in place strict regulations on reporting requirements for the acquisition, transfer or carrying of, and for manufacturing in firearms and ammunition, they specifically banned Jewish persons; and in this sense were more restrictive than the Weimer Republic, that had tried to restrictively regulate the use of firearms (Harcourt, 2004). The German Weapons Act 1938 superseded the 1928 law and rather than requiring a separate permit to carry and acquire a firearm, this Act required a purchase licence for handguns, although long guns could be purchased without one, the legal age was lowered from 20-18 and the permit period was extended from one to three years (Harcourt, 2004). During this period, members of the NSDAP were no longer subject to firearm restrictions, yet the legal facade of firearms legislation effectively disarmed Hitler's opponents (Harcourt, 2004, p. 653). Following the increase in firearms crime the newly created Weapons Act was intended to contribute to internal security, although it brought with it some particularly onerous regulations, such as the time limit on owners' licences, which were later amended in 1976 (Dickoff, 2005). The war continued to expand until the turning point was reached in 1945. Following the Allied invasion German war hopes began to fade, by which time the nation had suffered significant social, economic and political destruction (Dalton, 2014, p. 18).

In 1949 Germany became two states within one nation, each with different governmental administrations and jurisdictions (Kury and Smartt, 2001). East Germany became the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and drawing upon the direction of the Soviets communist model attempted to create a 'people's democracy' (Dalton, 2014). Whilst West Germany was established as a parliamentary democracy allied to Western democracies and became the Federal Republic of Germany (FDR) (Imperial War Museum, 2023). Affluence and a new political order transformed the West toward a market economy, pluralist society

with a democratic system (Dalton, 2014). The private use of firearms was authorised in 1956, following the disarmament of the German population by the allied forces after World War II, and the right to make regulations relating to the acquisition and possession of firearms was given to the German Länder (Dalton, 2014). Legislative responsibility was taken over at federal level in 1972 when the Federal Weapons Act came into force, and regulations continued practically unaltered until the events at Erfurt in June 2002 (Hurka, 2017). Despite the expectation for the division, a loss of legitimacy for the state and the GDR continued to decline and a policy of unification was considered the only source of stability (Clark and Wildner, 2000). Following the dissolution of the GDR in 1990 the governments of the FDR and GDR agreed to restore German unity (Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, 2022), and unification merged the two social and economic systems that had previously followed different paths (for a full discussion see Dalton, 2014).

Germany similar to other EU countries is bound by what was the 1991 Firearms Directive, 91/477/EEC of 18 June 1991, amended several times, most recently in March 2021, for more information see Directive (EU) 2021/555 on the control of the acquisition and possession of weapons, revised first in 2008. In response to the establishment of the Schengen Area and European Community (EC) market and potential loss of internal border control and likely negative consequences, e.g. unchecked flow of firearms, to compensate for the abolition of checks at intra-community borders (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015, p.2). This states that all members must obey minimum standards with their firearm regulations, in particular requiring a genuine reason for ownership and minimum age of 18 years (Hurka, 2017). Additionally, Germany is the only country where anyone under the age of 25 who applies for their first firearms licence must undergo a psychiatric evaluation with a trained counsellor, this also includes personality and anger management tests (Jowit *et al.*, 2016). Despite their strict firearms control laws Germany has had several PMS, which could arguably be said to indicate a failing of German ownership regulations (McVeigh, 2016). An overview of the PMS that have occurred in Germany will follow, beginning with a discussion around the static cases, those incidents that did not result in any political/policy amendment, before moving on to consider the catalytic cases.

4.3.2 Introduction to the German Case Studies

This section examines PMS in Germany between 1987 and 2016, providing an overview of the incidents and their varying political consequences. The perpetrator will not be named, however this and other details of the events can be located in Table 4.6. The section does not examine each static case in detail but instead provides an overview, identifying points of convergence and divergence and outlining the subsequent responses.

Table 4:6 Germany's Public Mass Shootings
(Authors own data)

There have been six PMS in Germany during the research period, resulting in 49 fatalities, 54 injuries, a total of 103 direct victims. Figure 2:1 shows the fatalities and injuries according to country, with Germany marginally higher than Britain in terms of fatalities, whilst Belgium has the lowest. However, only two of those PMS, Erfurt in 2002 and Winnenden in 2009, were catalytic cases, in the sense that they actually led to any 'significant' legislative change. Prior to this, there were three PMS, Euskirchen in 1994, and Dillingen and Bad Reichenhall both in 1999. All of which individually met the three fatality 'criteria' according to the FBI and other definitions of a 'mass' shooting, however, did not lead to legislative change.

4.3.3 The Static Cases

The first PMS took place in Euskirchen in 1994. Politically there was limited reference to the event, during parliamentary debates the following day there were words of remembrance for the victims (Deutscher Bundestag, 1994) but the event did not generate enough interest to produce any political action (Hurka, 2017, p. 88). There was also very little reference in the media, and even less in Google.de, Google Scholar.de and LexisNexis News-search, although the events of the Euskirchen shooting were turned into the film Tag der Abrechnung - Der

Amokläufer von Euskirchen 'Day of Reckoning-the gunman from Euskirchen', later that year. Euskirchen raised questions regarding firearm ownership and control, as the family of the perpetrator had warned police of his instability and unsuitability to own firearms, clearly indicating a policy failure. A spokesman for the prosecutor's office was prompted to draw comparisons with America (The Times, 1994). Nonetheless, concern about firearms, and PMS quickly dissipated.

The PMS in Dillingen in 1999 is distinct to other PMS mentioned in this research. There are several PMS that span multiple geographical locations, Hungerford and Cumbria for example, although these are often in close proximity, and certainly the same country. However, in this case, the shooting began in Germany and concluded in France. There was very little reference within the media, and it generated even less interest politically. Despite also meeting the fatality threshold it did not lead to a debate about firearms. Germany is a country with a long history of firearms production, manufacturing, ownership and use (P7 Nils, 2017). Shooting and hunting is culturally embedded, and these factors could explain the lack of public or economic interest (P8 Mick, 2018) and subsequent lack of discussion around firearm legislation. All of which combined would strengthen arguments in favour of maintaining the current status quo in regard to firearm legislation.

Less than six months later the Bad Reichenhall PMS followed. Despite being the third PMS in Germany, it was the first that actually triggered a debate over firearm control. There were similarities to the previous shooting in regard to the legality of the firearm, on both occasions the perpetrator had acquired their weapons illegally (Hurka, 2017). Once it was discovered that the weapon had been stolen, it led to a political debate over the appropriateness of German gun laws (similar to Erfurt, Winnenden and Lörrach discussed later). At 16 the perpetrator was the youngest mass shooter, not just in relation to Germany, but within this research. Reference was again made to the consumption of violent media and the perpetrator playing violent video games (Krach, 1999) was considered a contributing factor (P4 Simon, 2017). This resulted in considerable attention on young people and the 'corrupting influence of excessive movie violence' following the shooting (Hurka,

2017, p. 117). This debate also resurfaced following the Winnenden shooting and will be discussed in the following section.

There was concern regarding the storage of firearms and discussions focused on improved storage requirements as a potential policy solution (Hurka, 2017). It may have become evident that legislative action was necessary, however, public pressure was insufficient. Momentum for change faded. Despite the event being covered extensively in the media (Hurka, 2017), the German media were reluctant to call for political action. Whilst the shooting had not resulted in any changes, it had put the issue 'in the back of people's minds' (Kingdon, 2011, p. 98). Nonetheless, there was still no interest in firearm control (Hurka, 2017). It is unclear whether the absence of policy change reflected limited access to policymakers, the opening of a window only in the problem stream, disagreement over whether a problem even existed, or simply a lack of political will (Eckersley and Lakoma, 2021, p. 2). In any case, the shooting did not lead to any direct changes in Germany's legislative framework (Hurka, 2017). Whilst there was tightening of storage requirements, this took two and a half years to implement, by which time the PMS in Erfurt in 2002 had taken place.

Lörrach was the location of the final PMS in Germany in 2010, and although there were two PMS that preceded the Lörrach shooting, it is discussed here first, as it is an example of a static case. Lörrach is distinct to the other case studies as it was perpetrated by a female, and PMS are usually perpetrated by men (Lankford, 2012). Lörrach is an example of a PMS that began in the domestic or private space and then moved out into the public space (Duquet, 2016). The perpetrator killed her son and husband before shooting at passers-by in the street on the way to the hospital (Hurka, 2017). Once there she shot and killed a male nurse and critically wounded a police officer (Kelly, 2012; Hurka, 2017) with a small calibre pistol that she owned legally as a registered sports shooter. As with other lower magnitude events there was very little academic reference (for exceptions see, Kelly, 2012, Lankford, 2012, Hurka, 2017 and Lubkin *et al.* 2017). Occurring within two years of the Winnenden PMS, the Lörrach shooting resulted in anger and frustration that more people were victims of yet another rampage shooting (Zeit Online, 2010). However, there was no change in attention towards firearm control.

Similar to Euskirchen and Bad Reichenhall, Lörrach fulfilled certain conditions of a potential focusing event, triggering a political debate over the country's gun control, however, it did not lead to policy change (Hurka, 2017).

Although the Green Party called for the prohibition of firearm storage by citizens (Zeit Online, 2010) the influence of interest groups does not depend purely on the level of activity of an interest group, the counteractivity of other organisations is equally important (Von Beyme, 1998, p. 47). In this case, German gun-makers and gun clubs who lobbied parliamentarians to water down proposals (Knight, 2016).

This section has considered those PMS that despite meeting the fatality threshold did not result in any legislative change. The two catalytic cases Erfurt and Winnenden will now be considered.

4.3.4 The Catalytic Cases: Problem Stream - Focusing Events

Erfurt and Winnenden

The first of Germany's two catalytic cases occurred in Erfurt in April 2002. There was lack of agreement over the number of victims, as the majority of sources suggested there were 16 (see Table 2.2), this was the figure selected. The perpetrator had entered the school he had recently been expelled from (Böckler, Seeger, and Heitmeyer, 2010) with weapons acquired legally as a member of a shooting club (Hurka, 2017, p. 119), prompting another debate about the suitability of German firearm laws. Unlike lower magnitude events the severity of the incident made it politically necessary to address it (Hurka, 2017, p. 102). It was argued to be the worst act of its kind since the Second World War (Vogel MP, 2002). That is until another ex-student walked into their high school with a pistol stolen from their father's unlocked cabinet in Winnenden on 11th March 2009 (Bondü, Cornell and Scheithauer, 2010; Duquet, 2016). Similar to Erfurt, there were inconsistencies in the number of direct victims (see Table 2.3), therefore, the figure the majority of sources adopted was selected, in this case 15 fatalities and 9 injuries. Both were examples of PMS that had a significant impact on public consciousness and firearms control policy (Magill, 2022).

Policy agendas contain lists of Acts that are likely to be presented for consideration, they can also include a series of beliefs about the existence and magnitude of problems and how they should be addressed (Birkland, 2007, p. 63). Several lower magnitude events had already occurred by this point, the result of which was a build-up of problem pressure prior to the Erfurt and Winnenden shootings (Scheithauer and Bondü, 2011, p. 29). Windows opened in both the problem and politics stream, indicating that not only was there agreement that a problem existed, but there was also the will to address it. However, an issue moving from problem recognition to policy change depends on how problems are prioritised within government agendas, the influence of interest groups and the presence of intervening variables that can shape the potential scope for political action (Hurka, 2017, p. 33). With these conditions in place, focus shifts to the policy stream, where the feasibility and adoption of specific solutions are determined (Kingdon, 1984).

4.3.5 Policy Stream - Forming/Identifying Solutions

In the policy stream, policy formation and the refining of existing proposals in the 'primeval soup' occurs and alternatives are proposed, reconsidered and modified (Kingdon, 1984). There had already been a review of the German firearm regulation on the agenda and the shooting in Erfurt took place almost at the same time as the second and third reading of the firearm amendment (Vogel MP, 2002), although many of the original provisions foreseen by the government had either been erased or weakened (Hurka, 2017, p. 119). The events triggered a series of legal and other reforms aimed at preventing similar incidents (Ministry of Justice, 2009). The Erfurt shooting highlighted the opportunity to push for reform; interest was elevated, and solutions were presented. Whilst for some the focus of solutions should be on security measures in schools, this was quickly dismissed similar to discussions that focused on the limitations of the education system in meeting demand for school psychologists (Bondü and Scheithauer, 2009). Instead, there were two key issues that became the focus of the ensuing public debates and subsequent discourse. The first issue, centred around the perpetrator's consumption of violent media, both violent video games and movies (Bondü and Scheithauer, 2009, p. 688). This led to calls for censorship and higher age thresholds for violent media as a potential solution (Hurka, 2017, p. 121).

Nonetheless, attempts to frame the shooting as a societal failure resulting from the corrupting influence of violent video games failed (Hurka and Nebel, 2013, p. 401). This made it particularly challenging for those status quo advocates to deflect attention onto other issues and attention turned to firearms policy.

In the case of Erfurt, the perpetrator held the firearms legally. Subsequently, there were calls for a review of German firearm laws. Firearm control was once again identified as a possible area of political activity, with decisionmakers conceding something should be done about firearms availability (Hurka, 2017, p. 121). Erfurt obliged those involved to do more than just change laws, rather it prompted them to re-examine previous decisions (Vogel MP, 2002). As a result, the law was stopped in the Bundesrat and referred to conciliation. It was originally intended to prohibit pump-action firearms, although this plan was defused during the political process and pump-action shotguns with pistol-grips were prohibited instead (Hurka, 2017, p.1 20). Other changes included age limits for acquiring large calibre handguns increased from 18 to 21, and applicants under 25 years of age were now required to undertake a mandatory psychological test. Following negotiations and compromise several provisions were strengthened due to mounting pressure. The vote in the Bundestag in favour of stricter legislation the morning of the shooting undoubtedly accelerated the process (Hurka and Nebel, 2013, p. 401).

In the case of Winnenden, the perpetrator had stolen his firearm from his father, who had not stored it correctly leading to calls for tighter storage constraints (Soldt and Eppelsheim, 2009; European Commission, 2014; Hurka, 2017). In a similar way, stricter and more detailed safe storage requirements were quickly identified as possible policy solutions by some of the involved political actors, and both the police and Green Party called for a total prohibition of the storage of private firearms (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 2009). Whilst Chancellor Merkel was also keen to see stricter legislation this was not supported by many German commentators (Hawley, 2009). Following the Winnenden shooting there were expert meetings aimed at developing prevention and response strategies that included police officers, psychologists and legal experts (Leuschner *et al.*, 2011).

Political debates extended beyond firearm control, again focusing on violent video games and calling for age limits or bans on such games, echoing the remarks made following Erfurt. In particular those arguments centred around the glorification of violence and concern regarding copycat type events (Neuner *et al.*, 2009). Other recommendations by expert groups included improved building security, emergency guidelines and crisis intervention teams that aimed to both protect against attacks but also reduce the negative impact of a PMS, such as efforts to strengthen a child's social competence (Leuschner *et al.*, 2011). The amendments focused on the right to enter and search firearms owners' homes and clarify if safe storage requirements are being applied correctly (Hurka, 2017, p. 123). It was felt that the limited resources would fail to fulfil any systematic enforcement of such provisions and for many the change was considered cosmetic, a purely symbolic act (Hurka, 2017, p. 21). Amendments to firearm control often come about due to a slow change in perception, and a gradual development of new ideas about control (Ellerbrock, 2011, p. 209). Political firearm violence as seen has on occasion meant public authorities have had to respond promptly and rigorously (Ellerbrock, 2011). Whilst politicians reacted rapidly, the outcome was not as far-reaching as those following Erfurt (Hurka, 2017).

4.3.6 Politics Stream - Engaging in Political Activities

As a federal state Germany has strong political parties, an independent judiciary and powerful regional and local governments (German Bundestag, 2022). As a federal state Germany's laws are made in bicameral cooperation between the Bundestag and Bundesrat. The Bundestag is the representative body of the Federal Republic of Germany directly elected by the German people, and the most important of the legislative branch; the Bundesrat is composed of representatives of the Länder governments (Federal states), and legislation can be initiated by both chambers (CoR, 2022).

In his analysis of Lowi's works, Tremblay (2010) posits how policy determines politics and issues directly dictate specific policy outcomes, with demands articulated in response to a particular type or types of policy that govern a specific issue (Tremblay, 2010, p. 353). The process of bringing the public's wants to the attention of policymakers is known as interest articulation, and prior to any action

being taken the government must pay attention to what the public wants (Dalton, 2014). The articulation of public interests is often dependent upon the efforts of an intermediary or interest group (Dalton, 2014). Similar to policy entrepreneurs interest groups often participate in political discourse and occupy key positions necessary to bring about change or likewise to retard it (Hurka and Nebel, 2013, p. 398). As the first school shooting in Germany the impact of Erfurt was significant, generating considerable interest in terms of both academic and media attention (Hurka and Nebel, 2013; Hurka, 2017). It also featured in several political debates in the Bundestag and Bundesrat.

Winnenden was the latest in a string of high-profile shootings that also led to a spike in attention towards firearms policy (Hurka, 2017, p. 64), the shooting once again triggered political debate over the appropriateness of German firearm control arrangements. However, there was a lack of public support, and relatedly a lack of pro-change movement similar to that of the Snowdrop Campaign that followed the Dunblane shooting (Hurka and Nebel, 2013, p. 403). The Catholic Church established the Erfurt plea (Erfurter Appell) it also aimed to support stricter firearm control. However, despite this, it was the glorification of violence in media content that played the primary role, firearm control occupied a sub-ordinate role (Hurka, 2017, p. 122). Firearms were one of several key issues, subsequently discourse was diluted by the other competing policy issues that meant large scale change failed to materialise. Unlike in Dunblane, where firearms were the dominant issue, the debate around firearms was quickly defused (Hurka and Nebel, 2013, p. 400). However, there was also willingness to concede the need for some amendments to firearms policy (Hurka and Nebel, 2013, p. 401). Again, there were similarities with the UK, the speed in which the political process responded with its incremental changes satisfied 'broad public sentiment' and prevented any further social movement (Hurka, 2017, p. 122).

Despite the Green Party and the police aiming for a total prohibition of the private storage of handguns following both Erfurt and Winnenden (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 2009), the firearms law was only subject to incremental changes. Modifications included increased standards around obtaining a weapons possession card and guidelines around the safe storage of weapons (Leuschner *et*

al., 2011). However, the police were only given the right to be able to carry out unannounced home visits to ensure the storage requirements were in place (Hurka, 2017). It also led to the creation of a federal gun register (Library of Congress, 2013), furthermore, even experienced hunters and shooters with permits could be subject to psychiatric tests at any time (Hurka, 2017, p. 122; Kirschbaum, 2016).

Whilst many may have considered the change purely symbolic, for firearm owners, it was a drastic measure that dramatically limited their personal freedom (Hurka, 2017, p. 22). Pro-gun lobbies are often very active and there was opposition from the gun lobby and individual shooting groups. German shooters, hunters, collectors and producers were fundamental in preventing the original bill from becoming law (Hurka, 2017, p. 119). Supporting such arguments the Interior Minister (Wolfgang Schäuble) voiced concern that Germany already had the strictest weapons law, and instead the focus should be on if rules had been adhered to (Hawley, 2009). It was agreed that the focus on violent media and the role of the media needed to be addressed (Bettin, 2002) such shootings could not be explained solely by engagement with violent media. Public attention is often paid to an issue both within the media and society (Von Beyme, 1998), the length of the debates, the importance of party leaders involved, and the impact of the media are also considered.

Media sources are crucial in initiating interaction within the political arena, ideas on firearms control require debates involving journalists, party representatives, police and political actors and specialists (Ellerbrock, 2011, p. 209) and the role of the media needs to be addressed (Bettin, 2002). Winnenden generated significant public attention, it also featured heavily in the media (Hurka, 2017, p. 122). Media sources argued how most school shooters derived from households with firearms that were largely gun club members (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 2009). German anti-weapons groups and two parents of children who were killed in Winnenden argued that the law puts the interest of sports shooters above people's rights to life and physical integrity (Deutsche Welle, 2010). A similar debate occurred in the UK following Hungerford and Dunblane. For there to be any change in firearms control, there must be a degree of politicisation to initiate

control measures (Ellerbrock, 2011, p.209) and for some, no law is too tough (Smale, 2015).

There were a number of causes some of which were to do with inadequate weapons legislation (Bettin MP, 2002). In both cases the firearms that were used were licensed and used in sports clubs, although one of the perpetrators was not licensed to do this as he had stolen his gun, which only served to highlight how regulations could be tightened. Seven people were fatally shot during the recent shooting in Hamburg in 2023, bringing the firearms debate to the forefront again. Debates focused on the lack of firearms legislation and previously watered-down proposals as a result of pro-gun associations. Compounded with the fact the perpetrator had recently been visited by the police, and despite concerns, had only received a warning about his firearm and ammunition storage (Introvigne, 2023). According to Knight (2016), there is an unbelievably phoney pseudo concern that breaks out following PMS. Politicians suggest they are going to tighten legislation however, within months have turned to something else, once again open to pressure from the gun associations and shooting clubs (Knight, 2016). Similarly, those who oppose reforms often argue that there is little point changing anything legislatively as criminals do not pay attention to the law, and instead 'law-abiding' firearm users are being punished (discussed in Chapter 7). Moreover, where there are solutions, they often treat the symptoms and not the root of the problem.

4.3.7 Summary

Policy change due to PMS is essentially an issue of problem construction and interpretation. Not every PMS results in policy change. Despite meeting the fatality thresholds, and leading to political debates, only Erfurt and Winnenden actually resulted in any policy change. A combination of factors is required to bring an idea to policy fruition (Kingdon, 1984, p. 81) and there are important intervening variables that can increase or decrease the potential scope for the ensuing political reaction (Hurka, 2017, p. 33). Policy change is more likely where policy windows open simultaneously in both the problem and politics streams.

Germany is classified as a classical consensus democracy (Lijphart, 2012) with a resistance to change that is inherent in conservative welfare regimes. With a

population of more than 80 million, of which almost 2 million own in excess of 5.5 million legal firearms (German Culture, 2022), Germany's firearm culture, historical engagement with and love of shooting, combined with their political institutions presents significant challenges that mean policy change is very difficult to achieve.

Long-standing pro-firearm lobby groups have regularly opposed attempts to tighten firearms legislation, and it was not until Erfurt that any meaningful anti-firearm interest groups were formed, highlighting the dominance of pro-firearm interests in the German political system. However, politicians acted rapidly following Winnenden, illustrating that legislative reforms are possible when certain conditions come together, in this case; windows opened in the problem and policy streams; pre-existing regulatory reviews; the number of victims highlighted the severity of the incidents; media and public support (Von Beyme, 1998) and comparisons to 'American-style school shootings' (Kirschbaum, 2016).

Although some of the resulting changes were seen as either incremental (P8 Mick, 2018) or cosmetic (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 2009), they were policy changes nonetheless. The strategic focus on increasing enforcement rights by the police defused the firearm control debate, once again highlighting the nuanced nature of policy responses

That concludes the discussion relating to Germany, the next section will examine the PMS events that occurred in Belgium, another example of a country where legislation was adopted immediately after a PMS in Antwerp in 2006 (Duquet, 2016, p.5).

4.3.8 Belgium History of Firearms Ownership and Control

Belgium, similar to Germany, has long held significant economic interests in the arms industry. Its historical tradition of gun making has given it a worldwide reputation as a firearms country (André *et al.*, 2016; P7 Nils, 2018). Belgium has strong cultural links with firearm acquisition and use, demonstrating the special place that firearms hold in Belgium (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015). Hunting was the most cited reason for firearm ownership, as with many European States (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015), and there are a large number of shooting clubs

and longstanding historical shooting traditions (Carter, 2022). Previously, the main justification for possessing a firearm was self-protection (European Commission, 2019), however, recent research by the Flemish Peace Institute (de Labbey, Vanden Auweele and Duquet, 2022) emphasised how hunting, recreational and sports shooting are now the primary drivers for Belgian firearm ownership. In addition to the variations in the justification for firearms ownership, there are also differences regionally in the reasons for owning types of licences, for example, hunting in the south, sport shooting within the north (for a full discussion see de Labbey, Vanden Auweele and Duquet, 2021).

Rates of civilian firearm ownership place Belgium 59th in the world, with an estimated 1.5m privately owned firearms, both legal and illegal (Alpers, Lovell and Picard, 2022), although the majority are held legally. Of the 678,592 registered firearms in Belgium, 168,349 were owned by licensed firearm holders, each of whom possessed an average of four firearms (Carter, 2022). As of 2022, there were 5.73 registered firearms per 100 people, representing an increase of more than 8,000 new registrations (Carter, 2022). The rate of registered firearms per 100 citizens was only marginally lower than Germany (see Table 4.2). However, Belgium's population is considerably smaller, at 11.74 million compared to Germany's 84.44 million (Statista, 2023).

Originally governed by the Belgian Weapons Act 1933, the approach to the regulation of firearms was previously considered fairly permissive. The Act made a distinction between two types of weapons; sporting and hunting firearms, both of which could be purchased freely by anyone over the age of 18; and self-defence and military weapons, this included pistols and semi-automatic rifles (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015). There have been attempts to strengthen legislation previously. Belgium as an EU Member State is also bound by the European Firearms Directive 91/477/EEC which emerged to harmonise EU firearms legislation (Duquet and Goris, 2018, p.18). It also mandated Member States to ensure they maintained a record of firearm manufacturing, possession and trade (Duquet and Goris, 2018, p. 18). Nonetheless, Belgium retained some of the more liberal elements, in the sense that it was still possible to purchase many types of firearms legally without the need to provide proof of a genuine reason (Hurka, 2017, p.

148). Additionally, there were no background checks to assess suitability; likewise, there were no legally prescribed waiting periods, and when purchasing hunting rifles, photographic ID was considered sufficient (Hurka, 2017, p. 148). The Directive has since been amended several times, bringing substantial improvements to security (European Commission, 2018). Most recently Directive (EU) 2021/555 codified the original Directive to retain law clarity and transparency (Council of the European Union, 2021), as necessary when there have been numerous amendments.

Prior to the influx of weapons from the Balkan wars and the resultant increase in reports of illegal firearms (Carter, 2022), Belgium was considered to have relatively liberal domestic firearms legislation which meant firearms were easily acquired (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2016, p. 2). However, they now have some of the strictest licensing and registration laws, and according to Duquet and Goris (2018) some of the lowest homicide rates across Europe, despite a considerable reputation for black market firearms being trafficked by organised criminals. Nonetheless, firearms laws remained relatively unchanged following the 1933 Act until the 2006 amendment, despite a PMS that occurred in Bogaarden much earlier.

An overview of the PMS that occurred in Belgium will begin with a discussion of Bogaarden, the static case that did not lead to any political/policy amendment, before moving on to consider the catalytic cases.

4.3.9 Introduction to the Belgian Case Studies

The Belgian PMS that occurred between 1987 through to 2016 will now be considered. As explained previously, the name of the perpetrator will not be mentioned during the discussion, although this can be found in Table 4:7 below.

Table 4:7 Belgium's Public Mass Shootings
(Authors own data)

Belgium has seen three PMS during the research period, resulting in 14 fatalities and 129 injuries, a total of 143 direct victims. As seen in Figure 2:1, Belgium have the highest number of injuries and lowest number of fatalities across all of the cases included in the research. Two of those PMS, Antwerp in 2006 and Liège in 2011, were catalytic cases in that they led to legislative change. However, before considering the catalytic cases the following section will begin with a discussion of Bogaarden, a static case.

4.3.10 The Static Case

When examining PMS, particularly those that have occurred outside of Great Britain, data on smaller magnitude events are often limited. This is certainly true of the PMS in Bogaarden in May 1987, which is largely absent from both academic and open sources materials on mass or rampage shootings. Google Scholar.be returned only 15 results, of those only two (Hurka, 2017; Safarik and Ramsland, 2019) actually refer to the shooting. Hurka only refers to the incident briefly, noting the lack of data as a lower magnitude event. A LexisNexis News-search produced only one relevant source (The Times, 1987), and media coverage overall was limited. Similarly, a Google.be search returned no results in the immediate period within a month of the incident, aside from references on less reputable sources such as Wikipedia and Murderpedia.

Bogaarden is an example of an event that did not generate sufficient media coverage. This could be for several reasons. As mentioned previously, many media sources were not available electronically (Hurka, 2017). Another issue is the use of internet searches, namely English-language sites, that create a bias against international incidents and 'foreign mass shootings' (Lott and Weisser, 2018), particularly prior to 1990 where data is difficult to obtain and access. The use of Google Translate and an increase in the availability of historic media articles meant it was possible to access and view articles that previously would not have been accessible, including a Belgian newspaper headline source which produced a further article written by Huyberechts and Maes (2017). Limited media coverage, and consequently a lack of public awareness and pressure, often leads to certain events being excluded from data sets, making them appear least notable (Kelly, 2012; Lankford, 2015), or less significant least important in terms of lethality

and social consequence. This, in turn, can diminish the perceived importance of such incidents (Scheithauer and Bondi, 2011).

Belgium, similar to Germany, has strong cultural ties to firearms rooted in hunting traditions and a long history of firearm production. This may help to explain the limited public interest or discussion of firearms control following the focusing event, particularly when coupled with the absence of political debate after the shooting. As confirmed by Verleden (2023), there was no reference in parliamentary proceedings nor in any parliamentary draft legislation. It is unclear if it was lack of access to policymakers, or that the policy window only opened in the problem stream, but a lack of agreement over the existence of a problem, and consequently, a lack of political will (Eckersely and Lakoma, 2021) and the legislative framework remained unchanged. Bogaarden illustrates how despite fitting meeting certain criteria, specifically the fatality threshold, it did not trigger any substantive debate on firearms policy.

The catalytic cases that led to change in Belgium, specifically the incidents in Antwerp and Liège, will now be explored.

4.3.11 The Catalytic Cases: Problem Stream - Focusing Events

Antwerp and Liège

Belgium has experienced two PMS that can be classified as catalytic cases, both of which led to legislative change. The first occurred in Antwerp in May 2006. There were 'only' two fatalities, a woman and a child, and another victim was seriously injured (Spapens, 2007). Consequently, Antwerp did not meet the fatality threshold commonly used to define an event a PMS, and is therefore considered a lower magnitude event. However, Antwerp rather rapidly prompted a debate around firearm control, resulting in Belgium's most fundamental policy amendment since 1933 (Hurka, 2017, p. 81). The conditions surrounding the acquisition of the firearm revealed the 'loopholes' of the Belgian firearms law (Hurka, 2017, p. 148). The perpetrator managed to acquire the firearm solely with photographic ID, bypassing necessary background checks and the requirement to demonstrate a valid purpose for purchasing the firearm (Spapens, 2007; Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015; Hurka, 2017).

Despite this legislative amendment another PMS took place in Liège in December 2011, it was another example of a catalytic case that prompted a political response and legislative change. There was disagreement regarding both the number of victims (see Section 2.1.4) and the causes of injury; some individuals were shot, whilst others were injured as a result of the grenades. The figure adopted was the one used by the majority of sources (see Table 2.4), five fatalities and 125 injured victims, totalling 130 direct victims. In contrast to Antwerp, and indeed the other case studies, the Liège PMS not only exceeded the number of direct victims of each individual case, but individually it contributed to 50% of the total number of injuries across all case studies.

The combination of the earlier lower magnitude event in Bogaarden and the subsequent shootings in Antwerp and Liège brought the firearms issue firmly back into public consciousness, creating a build-up of problem pressure. Both incidents had a significant impact on public and political attention, helping to explain the opening of windows in the problem and politics streams. This suggests there was consensus not only that a problem existed but also that the political will was present to address it.

4.3.12 Policy Stream - Forming/Identifying Solutions

Within the policy stream new policies are formed and existing proposals are in place ready for refining and modification within the policy primeval soup (Kingdon, 1984). Firearm legislation had remained relatively unreformed since the 1933 Act, although there had been attempts previously to strengthen legislation to bring it in line with the Firearms Directive. The Antwerp shooting brought into question the Belgian regulatory approach and firearm control rapidly became the focus of political scrutiny (Hurka, 2017, p. 81). During parliamentary debates there were discussions regarding the firearm issue's place on the agenda prior to Antwerp, and how it had remained on the political agenda thereafter (Berkol, 2006). Indeed, legislative amendments were being discussed the week before, although Bex (2006) acknowledges that Antwerp had accelerated their work. Despite the speed, agreement had been reached regarding amendments to both reduce private ownership and bring it in line with the European Directive 1991 (Bex, 2011). Although firearms control had been on the agenda for several years.

In the early 2000s discussions regarding a new weapons law appeared on the political agenda with consecutive governments tabling proposals, yet consultations with interest groups and gun lobbies were plagued by delaying tactics from various quarters and proved troublesome (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015). Nonetheless, a draft text was tabled in parliament in February 2006 and within one week of Antwerp there were comprehensive and fundamental reform steps. The Weapons Act 2006 was approved by the Justice Affairs Committee of the Federal Parliament just six days after the shooting, virtually unanimously (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015). It required policymakers to work quickly, but they were nonetheless able to accomplish substantive work (Bex, 2011, p. 42). With virtually no contestation firearm legislation was tightened. However, rather than incrementally implementing changes, it constituted a clear break, drastically changing the regulatory framework; a pivotal moment for firearms control that was widely regarded as a significant advancement (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015). The amendment was intended to make it more difficult for private citizens to acquire firearms (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015), whilst also imposing licensing conditions upon them (Duquet, 2018).

The resulting legislation imposed a ban on almost all handgun ownership. Those who already held a licence could still buy and use firearms (licensed for five years), but all other firearms had to be surrendered (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015). Only licensed owners could now lawfully acquire firearms, although not without a genuine reason (hunting, target shooting, collection, personal protection or security), additionally, legislation now required permits to be renewed more frequently (Hurka, 2017). Under the new regulations, all firearms became subject to authorisation, a waiting period, and thorough police screening, forming a three-month process that prospective firearm owners must now go through to prevent impulse purchases (Crawford, 2016). Further restrictions included a minimum age limit of 18, a five-year limit on possession licences, and licence renewals required a medical certificate, and successful completion of a safe handling test (Hurka, 2017, p. 148). The comprehensive reform steps fundamentally changed the Belgian firearm control system (Hurka, 2017, p. 149).

Discussions regarding firearms legislation and policy often follow shooting incidents, particularly those in the public sphere (Andre *et al.*, 2016, p. 55). Antwerp might have accelerated legislative change, however, for some the issue of firearms was not considered a priority until after the Liège shooting (Bowen and Poole, 2016, p. 56). In the case of Liège, political debates extended beyond firearm control and instead focused on illegal weapons and trafficking. Liège illustrated the insufficient policy attention given to both illegal firearms and trafficking (de Labbey, Vanden Auweele and Duquet, 2022). In particular, the perpetrators' prior arrest had failed to focus on his collection of illegal firearms, instead prioritising his drugs trafficking (de Labbey, Vanden Auweele and Duquet, 2022). His lawyer had used the weapon's amnesty that was in place at the time as a defence for the perpetrator owning weapons, ultimately preventing his conviction for illegal possession due to technicalities (Adam, 2011).

The incident prompted policymakers in Belgium to focus on combating illegal firearms and policy comprised three instruments: the Weapons Act Plan 2012, the National Security Plan 2012-2015, and circular COL 14/2012 (de Labbey, Vanden Auweele and Duquet, 2022). The regime for historical weapons was revised, and in doing so, implemented a number of policy changes (Andre *et al.*, 2016). Only firearms produced prior to 1895 were now obtainable without authorisation, and they must be definitively deactivated (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015, p. 12). Another loophole relating to the HFD-list (historic, folkloric and decorative firearms) of weapons that were freely available and said to contribute to weapons tourism in Belgium (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2016, p. 13) was also later scrapped by Royal Decree May 2013 (for a full discussion see de Labbey, Vanden Auweele and Duquet, 2022).

Major changes occur to firearms law following tragic events that are widely publicised (Berkol, 2006). In both instances, there was a need for swift and robust responses, which was evident in the prompt action taken by politicians.

Amendments to firearms control often require a change in perception and the development of new ideas (Ellerbrock, 2011), with the hope it will contribute to reducing violence. Although for some it was not merely about firearms control or

how legislation could be improved, rather it is the monitoring and compliance with the law that requires improvements (Landuyt, 2011, p. 14).

4.3.13 Politics Stream- Engaging in Political Activities

Belgium is also a federal state composed of communities and regions, loosely compared to those in Germany (Belgian Federal Government [BFG], 2023). In the bicameral Federal Parliament of Belgium, there are two chambers that make executive and legislative decisions (Toshniwal, 2023). The primary legislative body, the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate, which functions as a meeting place of the federal communities and regions (Toshniwal, 2023). There are many political parties with linguistic and regional differences representing each community's interests/ideologies that make government formation challenging (Toshniwal, 2023). However, the purpose here is not to explore the composition of government, instead this section will consider the factors that influenced the body politic following the PMS.

Policy determines politics and specific policy outcomes are dictated by issues (Tremblay, 2010) in this case focusing events. PMS as focusing events can in the right conditions be elevated to social problems, gaining the attention of policymakers and the public almost simultaneously (Birkland, 2006, p. 2). This can result in heightened media focus, which can motivate policymakers to act (Hurka and Nebel, 2013, p. 392). Policy entrepreneurs and interest groups occupy key positions necessary to bring about change, or equally, to retard it (Hurka and Nebel, 2013, p. 398), although a significant number of actors must consider the condition severe enough that political attention is demanded (Hurka and Nebel, 2013, p. 392).

The Antwerp shooting highlighted an issue with the availability of firearms. In response, the public, media and political attention focused firmly on the firearm control issue. Whilst some became drawn into an emotional debate that centred on the shooting as a racist crime (Hurka, 2017, p. 149), discourse in this respect was less pronounced than the debate surrounding the firearm issue. Indeed, Berkol (2006) argues that this actually helped to focus the political debate on the issue of firearms availability, specifically easy accessibility, and in doing so calmed

any potential resistance from the weapons lobby. Moreover, the firearm control debate was heightened, previous attempts to address the outdated framework had seen initial reform attempts fail repeatedly (Berkol, 2006; Hurka, 2017). The availability of a policy solution, whilst previously unsuccessful, now presented an opportunity to control the narrative regarding firearm control, and in doing so helped to direct debates around preventing similar policy failures (Hurka, 2017, p. 149). Antwerp, similar to Erfurt, had now reached a point where it was politically necessary to address what was clearly another policy failure.

Antwerp emphasised the issue with firearms and the need for more stringent control (Hurka, 2017), and in doing so accelerated the decision-making and political process (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015; Hurka, 2017). Rather than elected officials taking the forefront in representing interests, it is often the larger and more influential interest groups that assume a prominent role, often accompanied by media agitation. The public also plays a crucial role in this dynamic (Von Beyme, 1998, p. 52). As a Corporatist country, Belgium's politics are highly influenced by lobby groups and interest groups, which similar to policy entrepreneurs frequently participate in political discourse, helping to shape policy decisions and at times, influence public opinion (Hurka and Nebel, 2013, p. 398). In the case of Antwerp, this helped to bring about change. Despite the relatively low number of victims Antwerp resulted in the most fundamental policy change in Belgium. Thus, demonstrating how complex the politicisation process is and how it is necessary to consider other factors (Hurka, 2017, p. 90), such as the length of debates, relevance of party leaders and additionally, the impact of the media.

Liège, as the country's deadliest attack in 25 years (Telegraph, 2011) generated considerable media attention and public outrage, it also led to a spike in attention towards firearms policy (Hurka, 2017). Although it still lacked the level of public support necessary to generate change similar to the response following Antwerp. Hurka (2017, p. 90) discusses 'objective severity', and the importance of media, noting how 'change-friendly' political actors can assist in pushing the firearms issue up the agenda. Belgium's highly fragmented party system and federal structure can present considerable political hurdles, making decisive political action particularly challenging, requiring negotiation and compromise (Hurka,

2017, p. 148). There was, however, willingness to concede the need for some changes to firearms policy (Hurka and Nebel, 2013). Yet political debates that considered introducing further regulations relating to the possession and use of firearms by citizens (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015), faced heavy criticisms, particularly those suggestions of tightening legislation. Similar to previous arguments in Germany and Great Britain, it was stated that legislation was already considered some of the strictest in Europe.

Such proposals are frequently put forward by politicians during debates, only to lose momentum. As mentioned previously, these suggestions merely address the symptoms rather than the root causes, when the focus should be on whether the existing rules were followed (Hawley, 2009). Despite the perpetrator being prohibited from possessing firearms, this measure proved insufficient in preventing their acquisition, it is therefore crucial to enhance monitoring and compliance (Landuyt, 2011, p.14). Moreover, in this particular case, the focus extended beyond ownership to include the perpetrator's background, which involved previous convictions as a habitual offender involved in drug and firearms trafficking (Jabot, 2011, p. 14). It was not solely a matter of illegal firearm possession. As a result, debates diverted attention away from policy around legal firearms possession to the international and illegal trafficking in firearms (Fernandez, 2011, p. 8-9).

There were again similarities with previous examples in Great Britain and Germany, which according to Hurka (2017) at least succeeded in appeasing broad public sentiment from some sectors. Whilst it was acknowledged that action is essential to strengthen the fight against firearms crime, and the Weapons Law was largely seen as a positive development (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2016, p.10), there were nonetheless criticisms that they had rather hastily passed a firearm law in 2006 (Bacquelaine, 2011, p.12). It was seen as an 'egregious example of emotion-driven policymaking' by many Belgian firearm owners (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2015, p. 7). A law should align with a comprehensive understanding of reality, regulate proven behaviour and address systemic deviations based on verified facts, indeed there exists no poorer motivation for modifying a law,

enacting a new one, or repealing another, than being driven by emotion and haste (Bacquelaine, 2011).

4.3.14 Summary

The firearm issue had been on the agenda in Belgium since 2001, although at the time suggestions of policy amendments were met with strong opposition.

Previously firearm enthusiasts, political parties, and a strong network of pro-gun interest groups played an important role in stalling more restrictive legislation (P7 Nils, 2018). There was also a lack of sufficient media coverage which meant the requisite pressure was lacking and subsequently the public and political debate stalled (Berkol, 2006). Policy change is more likely when policy windows open simultaneously in both the problem and policy stream. However, in the case of Bogaarden, the policy window only opened in the problem stream. This could have been due to a lack of political interest, or a lack of agreement over the existence of a problem (Zahariadis, 2016; Cairney, 2018).

Antwerp and Liège on the other hand did trigger political debates, in both cases resulting in policy change. As the shooting was perpetrated with a legally owned firearm (P7 Nils, 2018), Antwerp highlighted significant issues with firearms availability, and the clear policy failure triggered a debate. The usually vigorous lobby resistance was absent, instead they were forced to accept the significance and severity of the situation (Berkol, 2006). Any opposition were muted, firstly due to intense criticism but secondly, the political process had already been in place for several years, potential solutions could be refined, thereby accelerating the process (Hurka, 2017). The windows opened in both the problem and politics stream, indicating there was not only a problem but there was appetite for change. Following the dramatic events in Antwerp a strong response was required (Wathelet, 2006, p. 50). The Weapons Act was rapidly approved and implemented almost immediately (Duquet and Goris, 2018, p. 24), the most significant legislative change Belgium had witnessed since 1933 (Hurka, 2017).

The Liège shooting illustrated the insufficient policy attention given to both illegal firearms and trafficking (de Labbey, Vanden Auweele and Duquet, 2022). However, the ownership debate was quickly defused (Hurka, 2017). Discourse

around firearms acquisition was diluted by other competing policy issues diverting attention to the illegal trade in firearms (Fernandez, 2011, p. 8-9). This time, parliamentary discourse advised caution against a more severe approach, arguing that tightening legislation only targets those who correctly use firearms, and fails to deter criminals (Dedecker, 2011; Degroote, 2011). Understanding events must be prioritised over hasty judgements to find adequate measures to prevent a recurrence. Nonetheless, political considerations must not overshadow human suffering and tragedy (Jabot, 2011).

That brings an end to the discussion relating to Belgium, the PMS that occurred in Finland, the final country selected for inclusion in the case studies, and an example of a Social Democratic Corporatism country will be discussed in the following section.

4.4 Social Democratic Corporatism

As suggested earlier when exploring Germany and Belgium, corporatism is a structural characteristic of the policy process that can take many forms, and for that reason it is one of the most contested concepts in political science (Christiansen *et al.*, 2010, p. 26). Democratic corporatism places emphasis on the involvement of interest groups in decision-making, whilst corporatist democracy focuses on the role of interest groups as integral participants in the political process (Häkkinen, 2020). According to Häkkinen (2020, p. 249) both are interpreted as coherent extensions and practical applications of the social theory constructed by Durkheim. Häkkinen (2020, p. 249) explores Durkheim's work on welfare states and criminal justice and emphasises that social corporatism is considered a democratic institution. Combining corporatism with an egalitarian ethos, social democratic corporatist societies are often more inclusionary, more secular than Christian democracy as associated with those societies within conservative corporatist groupings (Hough, Jackson, and Bradford, 2018, p. 10).

Corporatism primarily entails the involvement of interest groups like trade unions and business partners, affording them preferential access and benefits when it comes to obtaining resources and opportunities (Molina and Rhodes, 2002, p. 321). These groups are effectively incorporated into the stages preceding

parliamentary policymaking and become integral to the policy formulation process (Molina and Rhodes, 2002, p. 321). Nordic countries in particular have a tradition of integrating privileged interest groups into policymaking through their membership on various committees, boards, and councils, although this has changed over the last decade (Vesa, Kantola, and Binderkrantz, 2018, p. 239). Molina and Rhodes (2002) suggest this is a result of corporatism as a concept falling from favour as its explanatory powers waned. The presence of committees comprising interest group members has diminished, while a growing trend in political advocacy involves direct contact with policymakers by lobbyists (Kantola, 2016). It is worth noting that citizen groups, which advocate for social causes unrelated to the economy, have historically held less influence within committees compared to educational or economic interest groups (Vesa, Kantola and Binderkrantz, 2018).

In contrast to conservative corporatist nations, where responsibilities for citizens' well-being are typically assigned to non-state entities such as family, religious institutions, employers, and voluntary organisations, social democracies adopt a significantly more engaged approach where the state plays a more proactive role in addressing citizens' welfare needs (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006a, p. 445). On the political left with a focus on universalism that sees a strong economic and social consensus (Siaroff, 1999), the social democratic version of corporatism is associated with high-trust societies that are stable and cohesive (Hough, Jackson, and Bradford, 2018, p. 11). Democratic corporatism is the capacity of strongly organised central economic interest groups, engaging within a quasi-public framework facilitated by the government, to interact with various stakeholders (Almond, 1983, p. 249). Political action, as discussed previously, can be challenging and quite often requires negotiation and compromise to reach agreement on social policy and political action. Corporatism represents a fusion within the closed relationship in the process of interest representation and policy implementation that is unavoidable (Cawson, 1986). Indeed 'interest representation could be understood as part of the political system' (Häkkinen, 2020, p. 250), and as such is a constantly evolving and variable phenomenon found in many policy areas with varying degrees of intensity (Christiansen *et al.*, 2010, p. 26). The focus lies on the influence of organisations and interest groups in

shaping policy formulation, allowing these interest groups to wield substantial impact over both the development and execution of policies (Götz, 2019).

Finland relies on majority coalitions that deviate from weaker types of government typical of other Nordic countries (Vesa, Kantola, and Binderkrantz, 2018). Tripartite income policy bargaining and related 'social pacts' negotiated between employers' peak organisations, unions and the state are referred to as 'peak' corporatism (Arter, 2006, p.11 cited in Vesa, Kantola and Binderkrantz, 2018); an important aspect of Finnish economic and social policymaking since 1968 (when the first policy deal was struck). On the other hand, 'routine' corporatism refers to the institutionalised integration of privileged interest groups in policy preparation and implementation (see Blom-Hansen, 2000; Christiansen *et al.*, 2010). Although the diminishing prevalence of the committee system is perceived as an indicator of the decline of routine corporatism (Kantola, 2016), whilst interest groups continue to occupy strong positions (Christiansen *et al.*, 2010, p. 21). However, this section is concerned only with Finland as the original social democratic country, characterised by robust interest groups that are recognised and supported by the state (Matznetter, 2002, p. 269).

Nordic countries share strong social and structural similarities although differ considerably in regard to their penal policies and practices (Lappi-Seppälä, 2012). Social democratic Nordic countries like Finland are distinguished by the presence of significant individual autonomy (Häkkinen, 2020). However, unlike other Nordic countries, Finland became a strongly executive-dominated polity where oversized coalitions have ruled with very little effective opposition from parliament (Raunio, 2011, cited in Vesa, Kantola, and Binderkrantz, 2018). Consequently, governments in Finland are stronger and capable of controlling interest groups and what they want in return in corporatist exchange (Öberg *et al.*, 2011, p. 378). Interaction between interest organisations and the state is seen as an exchange relationship, groups obtain favourable public policies in exchange for information and support of public decisions (Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen, 2015).

The distinction between homicide rates and imprisonment rates across countries and regimes still characterises Western European nations (Hall and McLean,

2013). Social democratic corporatist states are said to have the mildest policies, although this has not always been the case; prior to the 1970s Finland held the highest imprisonment rates among developed countries (Tonry, 2009). Whilst broadly stable elsewhere in Scandinavia, imprisonment rates increased in Finland before declining sharply after the Second World War (Tonry, 2009, p. 378). In the case of Finland, policymakers worked to make that happen, whereas German rates were stable due to scepticism from policymakers and judges, whilst in the UK policy fluctuated with the changing views of policy elites (Tonry, 2009, p. 378).

As mentioned earlier, when discussing neo-liberalism and Great Britain, during the late 1990s elements of the political economy and culture were severely eroded (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006a, p.443). Social-democratic policy came to be replaced by neo-liberal policy and consumer culture, and rates of violence rose, and with it the rate of imprisonment, although nowhere as high as in the USA (Hall and McLean, 2009, p. 332). Nonetheless, according to Tonry (2009, p. 281) such increases would place Finland more akin to neo-liberal states than corporatist. However, mirroring earlier instability, imprisonment rates in Finland saw a dramatic reduction (Häkkinen, 2020). This outcome can be attributed to Finnish policymakers acknowledging their incongruously high rates for a Western European nation (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006, p. 163-4) and instead choosing to make their penal policy less harsh. Corporatist political economy and consensus democracy, similar to corporatist states, tend to be commonly linked to relatively lenient criminal law (see Black, 1984; Greenberg, 1999; Cavadino and Dignan, 2006a). Häkkinen (2020) highlights Durkheim's view of social corporatism as a democratic institution essential for the effective establishment of regulatory measures aimed at restoring and enhancing social harmony and cohesion. This regulatory approach, as envisioned by Durkheim, aimed to decrease society's reliance on punitive justice as a means of fostering social cohesion (Häkkinen, 2020, p. 249).

Finland is a welfare state with internationally high levels of social security, equality, strong health and social and educational policies, high social trust, and political legitimacy (Lappi-Seppälä, 2012; Lindberg, Sailas, and Kaltiala-Heino, 2012). In Finland corporatism functions as a hierarchical and monopolised system with

strong interest groups at the top (Christiansen, 2017). Christiansen (2017) posits that corporatism both presupposes and fosters the emergence of influential interest groups. This perspective places a greater emphasis on interest representation compared to the role of political parties, as argued by Vesa, Kantola and Binderkrantz (2018), who suggest that 'votes count, but resources decide'. Additionally, Arter (2001a), delves into the role of parliamentary decision-making and opposition in policymaking. He highlights how the abolition of committee systems, as discussed in Arter (2001b), was considered a means to enhance the cost-effectiveness of policymaking.

Indeed, it is argued that Nordic corporatism is characterised by the privileged position held by economic interest groups (Christiansen *et al.*, 2018). Vesa, Kantola and Binderkrantz (2018) expand on this in their work, suggesting that there are two measures that indicate the robustness of Finnish corporatism. Firstly, the primary areas for interest groups' policy advocacy, such as committees, parliament; and secondly, which specific groups enjoy privileged access to the policymaking process. Due to their aim of garnering extensive political backing, governments in corporatist systems are motivated to engage in negotiations with influential groups that represent a wide range of societal interests (Vesa, Kantola and Binderkrantz, 2018, p. 252).

There is a strong ethos of consensus seeking that emerged from the political elite during the economic recession of the 90s (Kantola, 2016). Premised on the logic of sacrificing short-term interests for the long-term 'common good' (Vesa, Kantola and Binderkrantz, 2018), corporatism in the Finnish sense is epitomised by a relationship and negotiation process involving interactions among various interest groups, governmental agencies and policymakers (Almond, 1983, p. 260). Such interactions are less institutionalised; indeed, lobbying has become a more important advocacy strategy that sees interest groups increasingly lobby members of parliament and ministers (Rommetvedt *et al.*, 2013), despite this, parliament is considered less important as an advocacy site in Finland in comparison to other Nordic countries.

Nevertheless, parliaments have gained prominence as key arenas for lobbying activities. Economic interest groups naturally possess more substantial influence due to their larger network of contacts, as noted by Vesa, Kantola, and Binderkrantz (2018, p. 259). Conversely, citizen groups, particularly public interest groups, despite their initial perceived weakness, have experienced a growth in representation, leading to significantly enhanced influence, as articulated by Raunio (2011). This, in turn, underscores how interest groups can shape policies through their integration into the pre-parliamentary policymaking process, a concept that will be explored in greater detail in Section 4.4.6. For now, the discussion will turn to an examination of the historical context of firearms ownership in Finland.

4.4.1 Finland History of Firearms Ownership and Control

Finland is one of the largest European countries with a land area of 337,030 km² and a population of 5.6 million (Statista, 2024). In terms of land area, Finland is smaller than Germany, although Germany's population is considerably larger (see Table 4:5). Finland is slightly larger in land area than the UK, although the population of the UK is significantly higher. Whilst Finland is almost ten times larger than Belgium, Belgium's population at 11.6 million is double that of Finland. Nonetheless, Finland has the smallest population of all the case studies with 5.6 million, which is perhaps why it is often considered a sparsely populated country for its size.

Just as Belgium and Germany share important historic economic interests in the arms industry, so too does Finland. Much like its fellow Nordic countries, Finland possesses notable arms industries; and as a result, they benefit from exporting conventional (other than WMD) firearms (Veikkanen, 2020). Despite the recent implementation of stricter legislation, the country has observed a rise in arms exports. Notably, between 1994 and 2018 Finnish arms exports were valued between 10-223 million euros annually (Veikkanen, 2020). Although this figure declined to almost 161 million in 2020, the lowest level since 2011, indicating a 20% decline compared to the previous two years (SaferGlobe, 2021). It was not solely that there was a decline in the number of exports, for the first time in 20-

years, civilian arms exports also exceeded the value of military exports (SaferGlobe, 2021).

As a nation with a strong culture of firearm enthusiasts, including shooters and hunters, Finland consistently ranks high in international comparisons of firearms ownership (Kingsley, 2015), maintaining a place among the top ten countries with the highest number of firearms per capita (Amundsen, 2023). To put this in perspective, Finland is currently ranked 10th globally in privately owned firearms, whereas Germany, Belgium, and the UK are ranked 24th, 59th, and 82nd respectively. Finland has one of the highest rates of household firearms ownership in Europe (Squires, 2014a, p. 34; Hurka 2017). As a result, there were approximately 2,138,363 privately owned firearms, both legal and illegal, held by civilians in 2022 (Alpers, Pavesi, and Lovell, 2022). There are over 1.5 million licensed firearms and in excess of 600,000 licence holders in the country (Ministry of the Interior, 2023). Finland also lay claim to the highest number of registered firearms with 32.4 per 100 civilians compared to Germany, Belgium and the UK (see Table 4.5) with 19.6, 12.7 and 5.1 per 100 respectively (Alpers, Pavesi, and Lovell, 2022).

High levels of firearms ownership are often attributed to the country's hunting and recreational shooting traditions (European Commission, 2019). Forests cover more than half of the country and offer the ideal environment for hunters (Tsai, 2009). Due to the prevailing preference for hunting, rifles and shotguns constitute the primary choices among the Finnish (Duquet, 2016; Hurka, 2017). However, there are also an estimated quarter of a million handguns in circulation (Alpers and Wilson, nd), favoured primarily by individuals engaged in target practice rather than hunting. In addition to hunting and target/sport shooting, Finland boasts a strong military tradition obligating its citizens to participate in national defence. This service entails a minimum of six months in the army (Tsai, 2009; Kingsley, 2015). Conscription is mandatory for all Finnish males aged 18-60, while women have the option to apply for military service voluntarily (Kosonen and Mälkki, 2022). Consequently, it is unsurprising that the majority of young men in Finland are well-acquainted with firearms.

Finland's notable prevalence of firearms ownership and relatively easy access to firearms have been linked to a significant number of firearms-related fatalities, including accidental shootings and deaths associated with intoxication (Kingsley, 2016). The country's homicide rate is double that of other Northern European nations, though it remains low in global comparisons (Nurmi, 2014a, p. 14). Nevertheless, Finland holds the unfortunate distinction of having the highest rate of firearms-related deaths within the European Union. Equally alarming are suicide mortality rates, which tend to be highest in developed countries (Ilic *et al.*, 2022). In this context, Finland ranks 7th globally with a rate of 2.66 per 100,000 people (World Population Review, 2023). These factors collectively present a compelling argument that the cultural and social dynamics surrounding firearm acquisition and usage in Finland have cemented firearms as an integral aspect of Finnish society, often, they are viewed as 'simply part of the Finnish way of life' (Kingsley, 2015). However, it should also be acknowledged that for many, firearms are tragically associated with the darker side of Finnish life.

Finland maintains relatively stringent firearms regulations, with its foundational firearm control legislation comprising the Firearms Act (1/1998) and the Firearms Decree (145/1998). The Firearms Act is the primary legislation setting out the fundamental legal framework for firearms regulation, the general principles, definitions and guidelines regarding the possession, acquisition, transfer, and use of firearms (Ministry of the Interior, 1998a). The Firearms Decree complements and elaborates upon the provisions outlined in the Firearms Act, offering detailed regulations and practical guidelines essential for its enforcement (Ministry of the Interior, 1998b). In alignment with EU directives and international agreements, firearms legislation reforms were enacted in 1998, which included a partial revision of the Firearms Act (Ministry of Justice, 2009, p. 82).

Firearms ownership is permitted, contingent upon the presentation of a valid and substantiated reason, such as target shooting, or professional roles necessitating firearm use (e.g., the film industry), cultural or museum purposes, as souvenirs, or for signalling purposes. It is important to note that firearm ownership is not considered an inherent right in Finland (AOAV, 2014b). Individuals must apply for a possession permit within 30 days of acquiring a firearm. Permits for acquisition

and possession are granted by local police departments, and in some instances the National Police Board. The preparation of legislation for civilian use is the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior (Ministry of the Interior, 2023). Applicants aged 18 and above who wish to obtain a firearms licence must successfully complete a rifle shooting proficiency test. Additionally, their eligibility to handle firearms is contingent upon thorough background checks, which include assessments of their health, mental health, behaviour and criminal record (Hunters Central Organisation, 2009). Previously, Finnish adolescents aged 15 and older could acquire handguns for target shooting or hunting, provided they had parental consent (YLE, 2007; Hurka, 2017). As an EU Member State, Finland was required under the European Firearms Directive 91/477/EEC to raise the minimum age of firearm ownership to 18. However, Finland actively and successfully withstood EU pressure to abolish its national exemption to this rule. Although this decision attracted considerable criticism, particularly in the aftermath of the 2007 Jokela shooting (Hurka, 2017), discussed in full below.

Whilst the Firearms Act primarily addresses the regulation of firearm ownership, acquisition, transfer and use, the Hunting Act 615/1993, along with its associated Decree (amended in 1993), predates the Firearms Act and Decree and serves as the governing legislation for hunting activities in Finland. Additionally, various other Acts and Decrees related to weapons, animal welfare and nature conservation, collectively ensure stringent regulation of animal shooting practices (FACE, 2009). The Act sets out the legal framework relating to hunting permits, methods, conservation, and other aspects related to hunting wildlife, whilst the Decree provides more detailed provisions on licences, methods, and devices (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland, 2023). Anyone wishing to hunt must have a hunting permit, this is subject to passing the hunter's examination, a written test that explores various related aspects, such as game biology, firearms legislation and management, and each permit must be renewed annually (Tsai, 2009). Finland is an example of another country that found its firearms legislation at the centre of a debate following a PMS. Despite high levels of ownership, it was considered extremely unlikely that firearms violence, such as PMS, and in particular school shootings, would occur in Finland (Nurmi, 2014a, p. 8). However, Finland has had five PMS, with examples of both catalytic and static cases. In

contrast to other European contexts such as Norway and Switzerland, where no significant legislative changes followed PMS, Finland implemented amendments after two shootings in 2007 and 2008 (Squires, 2014a, p. 280). The following section provides an overview of these incidents, beginning with the Jokela shooting, an example of a static case that did not result in legislative change, before turning to Finland's catalytic case.

4.4.2 Introduction to the Finland Case Studies

During the research period, there have been five PMS in Finland, resulting in 28 fatalities and 20 injuries, totalling 48 direct victims. Notably, only one of those PMS, the Kauhajoki shooting, resulted in policy change. However, this change cannot be attributed solely to Kauhajoki; it was shaped by the combined influence of both Jokela and Kauhajoki, and, whilst investigations into those shootings were still ongoing, the Espoo shooting occurred. The following section will begin with a discussion of the Jokela shooting, the first Finnish PMS selected for inclusion and the first static case. In line with the previous case studies, the name of the perpetrator is provided in Table 4:8 below but will be omitted from the discussion.

Table 4:8 Finland's Public Mass Shootings
(Authors own data)

4.4.3 The Static Cases

Finland's first PMS occurred in Jokela in November 2007 (Larkin, 2009; Ministry of Justice, 2009; Raittila, Koljonen, and Väliverronen, 2010; Malkki, 2014). The incident garnered unprecedented public attention and extensive media coverage (Kiilakoski and Oksanen, 2011; Nurmi 2012). Although there was very little reference to firearms, and instead academic discourse focused on community, solidarity, and social roots (Nurmi, 2012; Oksanen *et al.*, 2013), media coverage, journalism, and the effects of media exposure (Raittila, Koljonen and Väliverronen, 2010; Haravuoir *et al.*, 2011; Backholm, Moritz, and Björkqvist, 2012) and mental

health, trauma, and responses (Haravuoir *et al.*, 2011; Shultz *et al.*, 2014). The event brought the previously dormant issue of firearm control to the forefront of both public and political agendas (Hurka, 2017, p. 129). It triggered parliamentary debates and discussions through oral questions, focusing on strategies to prevent a recurrence of such a tragedy. These discussions underscored a shared responsibility among decisionmakers to create a safe society where parents could raise children (Korhonen, 2007). Although that in itself was not enough to warrant any amendments to Finland's comparably lax (at that time) firearm regulations.

The emergent social movement against firearms was further inhibited by perceptions of the Jokela shooting being a one off (Hurka, 2017, p. 133), something that could not happen in Finland (Vanhanen, 2007). Public support for change was divided following Jokela. There were no political demands formulated by the media, perhaps in part due to the shooting being viewed as an unfortunate and isolated incident, or perhaps due to criticism for the media coverage of the shooting (Hurka, 2017).

Finland's media, in contrast to the other case studies, retained a relatively sober approach towards crime and reporting, adopting a less emotional tone (Lappi-Seppälä, 2012). Quality papers are the market leaders, as a result 90% of newspaper sales are through subscriptions, eliminating the need to persuade the public to purchase them every day (Lappi-Seppälä, 2007), consequently they are not dependent on sensational events to drive sales, and the tone of such reports is less emotional and frequently accompanied with comments on research-based data. As a result, ministers do not interfere nor base their policy decisions on the changing results of media polls (Lappi-Seppälä, 2007). This affects both how crime is reported but also how people think about such matters (Lappi-Seppälä, 2007, p. 243). Many regarded the incident as a manifestation of underlying societal issues, bullying and the perpetrators marginalisation (Ministry of Justice, 2009) whilst for some, it was a result of hidden malaise or mental health challenges, shifting the focus away from firearms control. Consequently, it emphasised the need for an adequate response that prioritised increased access to psychological services (Korhonen, 2007), rather than apportioning blame (Heinäluoma, 2007). For many it was beyond comprehension that such a tragic

event, usually associated with other parts of the world, could occur in Finland (Niinistö, 2007). In response to the gravity of the situation, the government established a commission to investigate the incident.

The Jokela report produced 28 conclusions, although the report was not commissioned until November 2008 and the report was not published until 2009, by which time the Kauhajoki shooting had taken place, and the investigation was already underway (see Figure 4:4).

***Figure 4:4 Timeline of Jokela and Kauhajoki PMS and Report publications
(Authors own image)***

The report emphasised the perpetrators intention to cause multiple casualties but also that they had drawn inspiration from other school shootings in Erfurt, Virginia Tech and Columbine. In addition, the incident revealed the need for improved coordination, school safety plans, and enhanced cooperation among emergency services (Ministry of Justice, 2009). With additional conclusions focusing on the systematic prevention of bullying and comprehensive treatment for mental health, improved cooperation of student welfare teams, but ultimately the need for investigation into such serious offences to improve general security to provide data and documentation all of which are valuable in the prevention of further occurrences (Ministry of Justice, 2009).

There were 13 recommendations, many of which intended to address multiple aspects of school safety: mental health provision, school/community security and media reporting of sensitive incidents. Only one recommendation addressed firearms, proposing amendments to current legislation, it focused on handguns and the relative ease with which the perpetrator had managed to acquire one, this presented an opportunity to strengthen legislation around firearm acquisition (Ministry of Justice, 2009). A series of reforms were triggered in response, although the measures were not undertaken until January 2009 (Ministry of Justice, 2009). The Jokela shooting might have dealt a blow to Finnish gun

culture, but the status quo prevailed until the Kauhajoki shooting (Hurka, 2017, p. 131).

The magnitude of the problem and the impetus for policy change after Jokela rapidly faded (Tedmanson, 2008). Jokela was considered to be the result of complex contributing factors leading many to focus on mental ill health, malaise and student welfare (Hurka, 2017). It was argued that a comprehensive treatment plan should have been drawn up including specialised healthcare in response to the fact that the SSRI medication the perpetrator was prescribed was not recommended for minors (Ministry of Justice, 2010). Rather than a firearms issue it was the perpetrators' loneliness and fascination with previous school killers that played an important role in the shooting (Ministry of Justice, 2009) and subsequent responses. The government's original plan to increase the minimum age of firearm ownership from 15 to 18 did not take effect until after the Kauhajoki shooting in September 2008. Even then, the amendment would not have prevented Jokela, Kauhajoki or any of the PMS in Finland, as all perpetrators were over the age of 18. The Kauhajoki shooting represents a catalytic case and as such will be discussed in Section 4.4.4. The discussion now turns to the next PMS in Finland, the Espoo shooting, which by contrast, constitutes a static case.

The Espoo PMS in December 2009 was the third to occur in Finland during a two-year period (Gabbatt, 2009). It was another example of a PMS that fits several definitions yet is excluded from many. As with other lower magnitude events, the Espoo shooting received very little attention despite reaching the rather arbitrary fatality threshold (Hurka, 2017). If events of this nature do not capture media attention, they are equally unlikely to garner the political and academic scrutiny necessary for them to be recognised as issues of societal significance. Consequently, they may remain relatively unnoticed. Reference to firearms primarily revolved around the adoption of the UN convention, aligning with the national implementation of Directive 2008/51/EC (Ministry of Justice, 2009). Additionally, there was criticism surrounding the government's proposals to amend or renew the Firearms Act and certain related laws (Hakola, 2010).

Although the shooting brought the gun control debate back to the fore, the perpetrator's weapon was acquired illegally (Hurka, 2017). This shaped the debate, which according to Hadley (2010) quickly moved from firearm control (regulation and restrictions) to firearm availability (ease of acquisition and broader implications). What little reference there was politically to the event, focused on the perpetrator's previous convictions and the 'functionality' of the restraining order (Viitamies, 2010), emphasising the importance of refining methods for identifying the risk of serious violence and optimising interventions in domestic violence cases (Brax, 2010). Despite the perpetrators' history of convictions for firearms possession, discussions focused on the connection between immigration and criminality (Hadley, 2010), and in doing so, diverted attention away from the firearms issue. There was strong emphasis on distinguishing between native Finnish citizens, who were considered as safe to acquire and use firearms, and individuals from outside Finland, who were seen as potential threats to firearm safety, public order, and security (Hakola, 2010). These debates are reminiscent of situations where a perpetrator uses a firearm that does not belong to them, as illustrated in the following incident.

Hyvinkää in May 2012 is one of only three PMS where the perpetrator survived. As a lower magnitude event with 'only' two fatalities, Hyvinkää does not meet the requisite fatality threshold for many definitions (Lott and Landes, 1996; Duquet, 2015; Hurka, 2017). Similar to other lower magnitude events there was very little reference outside of the media. Only 11 of 28 Google.fi results actually refer to the shooting, and of 383 Google Scholar.fi results only three mention the shooting; Keskinen (2013) who discuss mass shooters and feminism and Koljonen (2013) and Räisälä and Kara (2015) who discuss crisis response and management.

During plenary debates the focus was predominately on addressing the marginalisation and malaise of young people. In terms of legislative changes, there was a proposal to reform the Social Welfare Act and implement legislation to assist municipalities in fulfilling their obligations regarding mental health services. This was suggested as a straightforward approach to address the widespread mental health issues and the shortage of appropriate mental health provision (Guzenina-Richardson, 2012). Reference was made to Jokela, Kauhajoki and

Hyvinkää, where the perpetrators sought a violent outlet for their feelings of marginalisation, prompting a critical examination of the deficiencies in firearms legislation (Haavisto, 2012). In response, the Minister of the Interior clarified that once the investigation was completed, there would be a thorough review of previous reports and investigations.

Whilst it was too early to make political conclusions, given that the investigation was still in its early stages, she indicated that regulations relating to the storage of firearms could get stricter in future (Räsänen, 2012). This might involve a requirement for firearms to be securely stored in a gun cabinet when not in use (YLE, 2012). In subsequent written discussions, the focus continued to emphasise that the incidents were closely tied to mental health issues and the sense of marginalisation and malaise among young people. However, during these discussions, it was suggested that the perpetrators of all three PMS, Hyvinkää, Jokela and Kauhajoki, had been taking antidepressant medication, which was considered a potential contributing factor to the acts of violence (Kivelä, 2013). This shift in the debate away from firearms, persisted even in the wake of another PMS in Imatra in 2016.

The smaller the number of fatalities, the least noteworthy, the lower the likelihood it will be seen as an opportunity to push for reform. Similar to other lower magnitude events, despite meeting the fatality threshold the Imatra shooting did not garner enough attention, either politically or in the media. Whilst the shooting was mentioned in news reports, unlike the other shootings in Finland, it received no mention in academic literature, other than in relation to a stabbing in Imatra in 2012 by Oksanen *et al.* (2013). There was also no reference to firearms in parliamentary debates, instead questions were raised regarding the mental health problems that were behind such acts of violence (Sarkkinen, 2017). The perpetrator's assertions that he had carried out the shootings to access mental health services (BBC, 2016; YLE, 2017) only compounded earlier concerns regarding young people and mental malaise.

While firearms are inherently dangerous and, when combined with the unpredictability of human behaviour (European Court of Human Rights, 2020), can

pose a significant threat, the prevailing view was that social marginalisation represented a greater danger to Finland's domestic security (Helsinki Times, 2013; YLE, 2016a). The policy window opened only in the problem stream. It was not a lack of consensus about the existence of a problem; rather the core issue was identified as the mental health challenges and social marginalisation faced by young people. Consequently, the proposed solution centred on reforming social welfare acts rather than addressing firearms. Finland, much like Belgium and Germany, maintains strong ties to firearms, the arms industry, and deeply rooted cultural traditions associated with hunting and shooting. These factors could account for the absence of significant public and political pressure for change and influenced the allocation of resources and priorities. As time elapsed support for action declined, as noted by Blackman and Baird (2014). Emotions that had been intense following tragic events like Jokela and Kauhajoki gradually subsided. This allowed those tasked with legislating to approach the matter with a calmer perspective, as observed by Kankaanniemi (2010). Despite the urgency of the situation, Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen argued against the implementation of new firearms laws (YLE, 2012). Regrettably, these missed opportunities to shape the firearms control debate led society to return to the status quo (Hillyard and Burrige, 2012, p. 1).

This concludes the discussion of the Finnish static cases, the following section will discuss the Kauhajoki PMS, which occurred in quick succession with the Jokela PMS and prompted the decision to amend the Firearms Act (124/2011) .

4.4.4 The Catalytic Cases: Problem Stream - Focusing Events

Kauhajoki

In contrast to the other three case studies, Finland has only witnessed one PMS that prompted a policy shift. Although the Jokela shooting may have ignited the initial debate on firearms as a policy issue, this alone was insufficient to generate a united movement capable of driving change or producing legislative amendments (Hurka, 2017, p. 131). Instead, it was broadly perceived as an unfortunate and isolated incident that could not have been prevented (Oksanen *et al.*, 2013, p. 23).

Policy agendas can include Acts for consideration, along with beliefs regarding both the existence of problems and importantly how they should be addressed. Firearms availability might have been considered a policy issue that required addressing, however it was not enough to warrant any amendments to Finland's firearm legislation. Instead, a commission was instructed by the government to produce a report on the shooting, with recommendations intended to prevent a reoccurrence of similar events.

Given the circumstances of two PMS within ten months of each other, it is perhaps unsurprising that for some it was impossible to establish if meaningful policy change would have occurred had it not been for the Kauhajoki shooting (Hurka, 2017, p. 129). However, it made it practically impossible to ignore. As problem pressure was intensifying, the topic of firearms was brought back to the forefront of people's thoughts. As seen following the PMS in the UK, Germany and Belgium, windows opened in both the problem and politics stream, not only was there agreement that there was a problem but there was also a will to address it.

4.4.5 Policy Stream - Forming/Identifying Solutions

As mentioned previously policy formation and modification occurs within the policy stream; it is also here within the policy primeval soup that alternatives are proposed, considered and where applicable, modified (Kingdon, 1984). Prior to Kauhajoki amendments to legislation had not progressed significantly (Oksanen *et al.*, 2013). Whilst the government had taken steps to respond, supporting schools, updating safety regulations, and focusing on student welfare, the revision of firearms legislation in Finland had stalled between the two shootings. Hurka (2017) goes further, positing that not only was change not foreseeable at the time of the Jokela shooting, for some there was no likelihood of a direct legislative response during the ten months between the two shootings (Hurka, 2017, p. 12). Indeed, the Jokela report outlines the measures undertaken in the wake of both shootings (Ministry of Justice, 2009).

Efforts to tighten firearm control by the firearm lobby had lacked support following Jokela. Kauhajoki on the other hand triggered stronger social mobilisation (Hurka, 2017, p. 135), whilst highlighting the opportunity to push for reform, interest was

elevated, and solutions were presented. A commissioned investigation yielded 28 conclusions and 9 recommendations, all of which were intended to fortify general security and ensure lessons were learned (Ministry of Justice, 2010). However, mirroring the circumstances surrounding the Jokela shooting, a subsequent PMS occurred in Espoo in December 2009, prior to the release of the aforementioned report in February 2010.

Heightened public apprehension led to the rapid accumulation of 57,000 signatures in support of a petition advocating for the prohibition of handguns, submitted just one month after the shooting (Helsingin Sanomat International Edition, 2008; Hurka, 2017, p. 134-135). This resulted in a political process that saw handgun licence regulations subject to scrutiny, although they were not tightened until 2011 (Lindström *et al.*, 2011). Nonetheless, two firearm-related recommendations were issued. The first proposal appeared, at least on the surface, to advocate a total ban on handguns and aimed to ensure that all quick firing or multiple shot handguns were collected. This went further than the earlier recommendations made following Jokela, as well as those arising from the Cullen Inquiry in Great Britain. The second related to amending the age limit for possession, this time to 20 years. This echoed earlier indications that the government would increase the minimum age for purchasing firearms from 15 to 18 years of age. However, this proposal was met with intense criticism, driven in part by Finland's cultural and social dynamics surrounding firearm acquisition and use. The criticism was further reinforced when the Interior Minister confirmed that the Act would not have prevented any of the perpetrators from acquiring firearms, as they were all over 18 years of age (YLE, 2016b). The report additionally recommended applying a fixed term to all permits, and two-years recreational shooting became a contingent condition for granting a permit (Ministry of Justice, 2010, p. 10).

The recommendations would have been far reaching had they been realised; however, the handgun ban was declined (Ministry of Justice, 2010). Instead, a series of incremental adjustments, comparable to those taken by the German government following Erfurt, were proposed. The most significant changes related to those applying for their first licence, who would now require a review of their

background to establish their suitability, and higher age limits once again occupied a prominent position alongside compulsory medical certificates (Hurka, 2017).

In parliament strict measures were demanded to prevent tragedies such as Jokela and Kauhajoki yet there was not the political will to return to the matter of the pending Firearms Bill (Hakola, 2010). Unlike other European countries, it was not possible for the Finnish government to exert direct control over parliament's agenda (Siaroff, 2003, p. 456) and accordingly, rapid policy changes are considered to be the exception rather than the rule (Hurka, 2017, p. 129). Indeed, arguments again focused on how a complete ban on semi-automatic weapons would only hinder shooting hobbies and activities. Despite initial indications suggesting the possibility of amendments, no real efforts took place, and the process unfolded at a sluggish pace (Hurka, 2017). The advancement of movements seeking to reform firearm control was impeded by the pervasive presence of firearms (Hurka, 2017, p. 131), and by the prevailing influence of Finland's dominant ideology and national culture (Kingdon, 1984). Within the European Union, Finland is recognised for staunchly upholding its traditions of widespread firearms ownership (Tanner, 2007).

Problematic behaviours associated with firearms are often the consequences of underlying societal issues and according to the Ministry of Justice (2010) a long process involving many factors led to the perpetrator committing such acts. It is therefore not realistic to expect or demand that these problems can be eliminated through the use of firearms regulations (Hakola, 2010). Whilst firearms related supervision and legislation can significantly affect the risk of misuse, in cases where an illegal weapon is used it is improbable that such use will be affected by firearm legislation.

4.4.6 Politics stream- Engaging in Political Activities

Finland functions as a unitary state with a decentralised administrative structure (Ministry of Justice, 2023), it is devoid of democratically elected regional entities and comprises a unicameral national parliament known as the Eduskunta (Hewgley, 2013, p. 10). The Eduskunta consists of 200 members or MPs who are elected to serve four-year terms (Raunio, 2011, p. 6). Many of those MPs lack

prior political party experience and despite this have been increasing in number since the early 1980s (Ruostetsaari, 2000). They have additionally gained increasing control over cabinet formation and the legislative process that is characterised by the requirement of a simple majority vote in the plenary session for a bill to become law (Hewgley, 2013, p. 11) a phenomenon that has evolved since the declaration of Finland's independence in 1917 (Raunio, 2011).

Corporatism entails the involvement of interest groups that are incorporated into parliamentary processes and policymaking, and as such are integral to the policy formation process (Molina and Rhodes, 2002, p. 321). In corporatist systems such as Finland, governments are motivated to engage in negotiations with a diverse array of influential interest groups representing various societal interests (Vesa, Kantola, and Binderkrantz, 2018). In the case of Finland, interest representation is part of the political system and interest groups possess the capacity to exert pressure on policymaking, wielding substantial influence over the development and execution of policies (Götz, 2019; Häkkinen, 2020), particularly during the pre-parliamentary stages of the process.

The Finnish legal system clearly demonstrates its foundation in the legal traditions of Western Europe, strongly influenced by neighbouring Nordic countries (Lappi-Seppälä, 2012, p. 206). Parliament is considered less important as an advocacy site in Finland compared to other Nordic countries as membership of the EU has seen constraints placed on their legislative prerogatives (Raunio, 2011). In addition, corporatism places greater emphasis on interest representation compared to the role of political parties (Rokkan, 1996). Despite this, Finland actively and successfully withstood pressure from the EU to implement the Firearms Directive and raise the age of ownership, as mentioned earlier.

Interaction between interest organisations and the state is seen as an exchange relationship, where groups obtain favourable public policies in exchange for information and support of public decisions (Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen, 2015). Political advocacy involves direct contact with policymakers by lobbyists (Kantola, 2016) and Finland's political landscape has traditionally featured opposition parties that play a substantial role in shaping governmental

policy (Raunio, 2011, p. 26). Party-political cooperation across ideological divides is normal (Salo, 2022) resulting in the political system being characterised as consensual and elitist (Ruostetsaari, 2000).

The public and interest groups play a crucial role in political discourse, shaping policy and influencing decisions. As discussed earlier, the public's wants are brought to the attention of the policymakers through interest articulation, requiring the government to pay attention to what the public wants (Dalton, 2014). Similar to policy entrepreneurs interest groups occupy key positions that allow them to participate in political discourse, and both bring about but also retard change (Hurka and Nebel, 2013). This could have a significant impact on firearms policy, dependent on which group (pro or anti) are dominant. In the case of Finland, a small but loud minority of firearm hobbyists were strongly opposed to almost all firearms restrictions (Kingsley, 2015).

During parliamentary debates amendments to the firearms legislation were met with staunch opposition. Highlighting this, Oinonen (2010) posited that hundreds of thousands of people working in a legal hobby would be negatively affected, arguing that more children die from parental abuse and are struck by lightning each year than those killed with a licensed firearm and yet there are no laws enacted that prohibit parenting or going outside during thunderstorms. Going further, Oinonen (2010) contends that Washington is the murder capital of the world despite having firearms bans, whilst Great Britain, Belgium, and Japan have all enforced firearms restrictions and tightened their legislation and yet have not seen a reduction in homicide or firearm violence. Although P1 suggests that Chicago is the murder capital of the USA "with more gun laws than anywhere else, so obviously gun laws don't work". Moreover, attributing Washington as the murder capital solely based on its firearms ban oversimplifies a complex issue. Other factors may contribute to its high murder rate, such as socio-economic disparities and illicit firearms trade from neighbouring regions, moreover, numerous studies have shown a positive correlation between firearms restrictions and a reduction in homicide or firearms violence (see Goss, 2015; Grinshteyn and Hemenway, 2016; Kalesan *et al.*, 2016).

Some proponents sought to celebrate the country's hunting legacy, arguing that not only does hunting support the local economy, but it also enables those low-income households to supplement their food (Mustajärvi, 2010). Finnish gun enthusiasts, hunters and those who participate in voluntary national defence and those who deal with weapons for their profession are not a threat to public order and security (Hakola, 2010). Likewise, the responsible gun enthusiast who stores his firearms in an approved manner is not considered a threat to public order and safety (Räsänen (2010). However, this perception is often shattered when individuals with legally owned weapons engage in PMS, as seen in the tragic incidents in Hungerford, Dunblane, Cumbria, Euskirchen, Erfurt, Lörrach, Bogaarden, Antwerp, Jokela and Kauhajoki.

The Mayor of Kauhajoki supported a change of legislation to make it harder for young people in Finland to access firearms (Rosenberg, 2008) although there was still heavy criticism particularly around tightening legislation. The shootings might have created a certain kind of pressure, leading some to suggest that amending firearms legislation will fix the fundamental problems of the entire Finnish society, yet it will not remove illegal weapons nor improve the malaise of the young people (Kyllönen, 2010). Mental illness and violence cannot be controlled with such measures; the prevention of such atrocities requires a focus on solutions that address the causes first, in the case of Finland, the psychiatric rehabilitation of young people (Kähkönen, 2010). Moreover, as discussed elsewhere (see for example Chapter 7) tightening firearms legislation focuses on punishing those who legally use firearms rather than criminals who are not known for upholding the law.

Policymakers make decisions based on how a potential problem or issue has been defined or framed (Zahariadis, 2007, p. 66), it is not that attention relates to an objective measure of the problems' importance, rather it depends on the audiences and those making the decisions, and their interests and biases (Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016). Existing views on policies held by policymakers or resistance from policy communities and interest groups can both present barriers and also lean towards change (Kingdon, 1984). Support for an issue or problem allows it to be pushed and on occasion can be solely responsible for its rise to prominence on the agenda; proposals that are not in line with the values of

specialists, interest groups and policy communities have less chance of success (Kingdon, 1984, p. 140). Changes in national mood can see opposition overcome and subsequently the political stream lean towards change (Kingdon, 1984) as was the case in Kauhajoki. They can also mitigate against change as was the case following Jokela, during which time a divided group of status quo advocates managed to delay the political process at least until the Kauhajoki shooting reinforced the reform movement (Hurka, 2017).

When a policy window opens because a problem is pressing, it could be that the alternatives generated as solutions fare better if they meet political acceptability tests (Kingdon, 1984). This was seen in the case of Jokela, where the successful coupling of solutions to problems stalled. Change may have been on the agenda, or at least appeared to be imminent, solutions were presented, however no direct legislative response was foreseeable in the months between the shootings (Hurka, 2017). The policy window closed not because of a scarcity of solutions but rather due to the anticipated challenges in its implementation, owing to strong resistance against efforts to strengthen legislation influenced by cultural, political, and societal factors. Whilst the evidence supporting the impact of reducing firearms is unequivocal from a public health perspective (Kingsley, 2015), opposition to stricter firearm control in Finland reflects the nation's struggle to acknowledge the societal consequences resulting from its current approach to firearms (Overton, 2012, cited in Kingsley, 2015).

It might have been possible to ignore it previously but two PMS within 10 months of each other pushed the issue to the forefront: stimulating concern around firearms acquisition and misuse, demanding some sort of action (Kingdon, 1984). Policymakers have to pay attention to a problem, simultaneously being receptive to a proposed solution (Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016, p. 5). Whilst many were aware that the firearms proposal would not eliminate society's problems by itself it was one part of a solution. There was a willingness to concede the need for amendments to strengthen firearms policy (Rantakangas, 2010; Hurka and Nebel, 2013). The problem is recognised, and there is political will to bring about change (Coombes, 2020). This presented those responsible for policymaking with the motive and opportunity (Kingdon, 1984; Cairney and Zahariadis, 2016). An

alternative is coupled to a problem as a solution and is then considered seriously (Kingdon, 1984), when combined with support in the political stream, that alternative is seized upon by politicians and justified as a solution to a real problem (Cairney, 2018b).

Whilst the perpetrator's mental health and social exclusion were considered to be contributing factors (Ministry of Justice, 2010), firearm control became the focus of public and political attention. Additionally, increased media pressure indicated that the government had abandoned firearms control following Jokela, and now legislative action was the only solution (Hurka, 2017). It is not possible to claim with certainty that there would have been any amendment to firearms legislation had the Kauhajoki shooting not taken place within ten months of Jokela, nonetheless, the sequence of events kept firearms at the forefront of debates.

In the case of Great Britain, Germany and Belgium, the political process and those tasked with policymaking responded quickly, rather hastily passing firearms legislation (Bacquelaine, 2011), and in doing so were criticised for emotion-driven or 'knee-jerk' policymaking (Duquet and Van Alstein, 2016). Yet in the case of Finland, the investigations and subsequent delay with publication, meant that over a period of 25 months there were not two but three PMS, two of which resulted in investigations and despite the PMS indicating clear policy failures Finland were struggling to come to terms with the impact firearms were having on their society.

4.4.7 Summary

Finland's response to PMS sheds light on the intricate interplay of cultural, political and social factors within the context of policy change (Hurka, 2017). In comparison to other European countries discussed earlier, Finland's response appeared more gradual and less decisive, rather than a consistent or significant change in firearms legislation.

Finland's dominant ideology, deeply rooted firearms culture and relationship with firearms that have collectively contributed to notable levels of firearm ownership; ranking Finland among the top ten countries globally in terms of firearms per

capita (Amundsen, 2023). Consequently, Finland has encountered significant challenges in formulating effective responses to PMS.

Occurring within ten months of the Jokela shooting, the Kauhajoki shooting acted as a catalyst that opened windows in both the problem and politics streams. Unveiling underlying societal problems, mental health challenges and social marginalisation faced by young people, overshadowed the focus on firearms control (Ministry of Justice, 2009). Consequently, the proposed solutions centred on reforming social welfare acts and prioritised increased access to psychological services (Korhonen, 2007) such as mental health issues and social exclusion rather than only firearms control. The pressure to address the firearms issue heightened public concern and culminated in a petition for a handgun ban (Helsingin Sanomat International Edition, 2008). Although, opposition from the hunting lobby and political figures led to resistance, slowing legislative amendments. Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen for example, expressed concern regarding how young people would be affected by new legislation (Kingsley, 2016).

Notwithstanding a succession of PMS over 25 months, support for action declined as time elapsed, and the prospect of change was not foreseeable (Hurka, 2017). Finland's journey in addressing PMS reflects the intricate balance between societal values, political structures and the challenges associated with changing deeply ingrained cultural practices. Finland's social democratic corporatist structure, characterised by a consensual and elitist political system, contributed to a more gradual and less decisive approach to policy change. The prevailing view in Finland that social marginalisation posed a greater threat to domestic security than firearms has complicated efforts to implement stricter firearm control measures.

Whilst a series of incremental adjustments have been made, Finland has encountered significant challenges in formulating effective responses due to strong ties to firearms, the arms industry, and deeply rooted cultural traditions associated with hunting and shooting.

That concludes Stage One of the research and the discussion of the case studies. The following chapter introduces Stage Two of the research, presenting the findings, before progressing to an analysis of the qualitative participant interviews.

Chapter 5 : Stage Two The Participants' Perspectives, A Multiple Streams Approach

5.1 Introduction

This research seeks to understand the complex social dynamics and underlying mechanisms that contribute to policy change, or the lack thereof, in response to public mass shootings (PMS). Stage One of the research analysed the policymaking process using Kingdon's (1984) Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) to identify how issues gained attention, and how political factors influenced policymaking within the case studies. Stage Two builds upon this by exploring participants' perspectives on the factors that shape the policymaking process. The findings from the qualitative participant interviews will be presented in the following 3 chapters. Firstly, Chapter 5 presents the deductive themes organised around the MSF, whilst the inductive themes that emerged during the data analysis are presented in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, the discussion is structured to synthesise the findings from the three participant groups with the existing literature.

Adopting a critical realist (CR) approach to participant recruitment, data collection and analysis supported the eliciting of relevant data aligned with the research methodology and aim. As outlined within the methodology, participants were given the option to remain anonymous; alternatively, they could choose for their name or the name of their affiliated organisation to be included. Only two of the participants, P1 and P6, chose to remain anonymous, the other nine will be referred to by their first names.

Participants were initially organised according to their role or affiliation into three groups (see Table 3:2): those from law enforcement or political backgrounds; those representing lobby or interest groups; and those who had lost loved ones to PMS. Several participants' roles overlapped. Martin acknowledged his bias as a former shooter, Bobby and Mick were both victims who had lost someone to PMS but also were involved in lobbying through the GCN. Additionally, Bobby, despite losing family members in a mass shooting, expressed an interest in resuming his childhood hobby of pheasant shooting, though he acknowledged that some of his fellow campaigners found this difficult to understand (see Section 5.5.2.).

A CR lens recognises the complexity of PMS policy debates, with multiple situational factors influencing participants' perspectives. Categorising the participants provided an initial structure for the discussion, although it was imperative to acknowledge the intricate interplay of cultural, socio-political, and personal factors that shape views on firearms ownership and use. Rigid groupings risked oversimplifying the participants' diverse and nuanced experiences. To capture the full range of perspectives offered by the participants, a holistic thematic analysis of the interview data was considered the most suitable approach. Rather than categorising participants' perspectives into distinct groups, the findings were synthesised and reported in a more cohesive and integrated manner. It was essential to capture individual contexts and areas of shared experiences, enabling a deeper understanding of the situated nature of beliefs and perspectives surrounding this complex issue, whilst avoiding unnecessary separation and repetition.

5.2 Problems, Policies and Politics: A Multiple Streams Approach

The data analysis process involved two complementary approaches. Initially, a deductive approach was employed to organise and analyse the data guided by the MSF categories, the problem, policy and politics stream. An inductive approach was also adopted, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data itself, rather than being imposed by the theoretical framework. This enabled the identification of additional themes beyond the MSF, such as definitional, cultural, and social complexities/contexts surrounding the issue. Combining these deductive and inductive approaches, patterns and connections could be explored between the interview responses and the different streams outlined by the MSF, simultaneously, remaining open to capturing nuances and themes that fell outside the boundaries of the framework.

Aligning with the research question, the use of Kingdon's MSF as a theoretical framework to organise both the case studies and interviews enabled a systematic analysis of policy change in the context of PMS and firearms legislation, providing a coherent and structured foundation for my research. This approach enabled a detailed exploration of participants' perspectives and insights, situating their views within the broader theoretical framework as applied to the case studies.

The analysis of the problem stream explored how participants perceived and defined the problem of PMS, including their understanding of the causes, risk factors and impacts associated with such events. Within the policy stream analysis, participants' views on existing firearms legislation, their opinions on policy alternatives and assessments of the effectiveness of different policy approaches were examined. Finally, the politics stream analysis focused on examining participants' perspectives on the role of interest groups, lobbying efforts, media influence, political dynamics and public opinion in shaping firearms legislation.

The interview data was organised and analysed using the MSF, providing a comprehensive understanding of how actors perceived PMS. This approach aligns with CR's aim of employing in-depth inquiry to explain underlying social phenomena (Bhaskar, 1978). The interviews revealed the complexity of responses to PMS, highlighting the influence of cultural identities, politics, media, public discourse, and the emotions surrounding these tragic events. These factors shape debates and policies in varied ways across different contexts. The deductive themes corresponding to the problem, policy and politics streams, as anticipated given the MSF, are discussed in the following sections.

5.3 The Problem Stream

“What happened to my family, Michael Atherton he had a history of domestic violence, he threatened to shoot himself, police confiscated his guns, they gave him them back which obviously that was a big fatal mistake for them” (Bobby)

Focusing events, such as PMS, call attention to problems that are often not self-evident (Kingdon, 1984, p. 99), they need to be recognised, defined and framed as problems worthy of attention and action. It is therefore necessary to understand how problems come to the attention of those tasked with making policy decisions in and around government.

The interviews with participants provided valuable insights into the role of focusing events on policy solutions, the political factors shaping firearms legislation, aligning with the key elements of the MSF, and how PMS have been

conceptualised as policy problems. Several participants discussed policy failures that allowed individuals who were prohibited from owning firearms to legally acquire the weapons that were subsequently used in PMS.

Simon is both a researcher and someone who has participated in a variety of shooting activities from field target shooting to driven game shooting. During his interview, Simon commented on the legality of the weapons used during the Hungerford and Dunblane shootings, questioning if the perpetrators should have been in possession of the weapons.

Similarly, Martin, the Lead Forensic Scientist for NABIS and Graham, Secretary for the British Sports Shooting Council (BSSC), also a shooting consultant for the Countryside Alliance, noted how Hungerford, Dunblane and Cumbria were all perpetrated by certificate holders:

"Both the Hungerford and Dunblane shooting, there was absolute clear evidence which had been flagged up that these were people who should not be in possession of firearms" (Martin)

"We had Hamilton, we had Bird, and God what's the Hungerford guys' name, Ryan ... were all certificate holders but they probably shouldn't have been" (Graham)

The participants' comments highlight flaws in the existing frameworks that were intended to address risks and problems related to firearms ownership.

Bobby offers a unique viewpoint, shaped by his personal experiences as a victim of a mass shooting and an advocate with the GCN. Reflecting on the complexity of his stance on firearms he acknowledged his perspective is particularly distinct as he navigates multiple and seemingly conflicting elements related to PMS and firearms, notably:

"I'm a victim who lost someone to mass murder, but I love shooting"

Participants' comments highlight how failures in the administration of firearms legislation, and in some instances, the police failing to discharge their duties correctly meant some individuals were not prevented from possessing firearms.

Bobby argues that the main issue is not firearms legislation itself, instead he placed responsibility on failures by the police:

"it's not so much the law ... it's the way the police deal with these applications ... the police's system is failing more than the law"

This highlights a need to improve the administration of firearms licensing to prevent policy failures.

In his role as Senior Researcher for the Flemish Peace Institute Nils focuses specifically on firearms issues, he discussed how PMS can indicate there is a problem and in doing so capture the attention of those responsible for policymaking:

"when something happens here, we tend to change the legislation, but what I think happens is that you actually look at the type of incidents ... what happened, what went wrong with the procedure to get the gun, and that specific aspect is then targeted with new legislation and new procedures"

This illustrates how focusing events can highlight problems with specific elements of firearms policy creating pressure for legislative change.

Nick, Head of the Firearms Policy Unit at the Home Office, discussed how certain PMS can create distinct concentrating problems and policy windows, compared to more routine incidents. In the case of Dunblane:

"concern about firearms ... led to handguns being effectively prohibited in this country"

As suggested in the MSF, heightened public awareness introduced temporary policy windows for aligned policy changes.

Mick suggests that focusing events such as Dunblane and Hungerford highlight problems with existing firearms legislation, and in doing so, become drivers for policy change:

"well obviously the handgun ban was driven by Dunblane, it would not have happened otherwise"

These quotes illustrate how PMS can act as focusing events that bring attention to the problem of firearm violence. Such events move the problem to the forefront of the policy agenda, creating a sense of crisis that demands legislative action to address it. This alignment of heightened public concern with the problem stream, opens a window of opportunity for potential policy change, in line with the MSF dynamics.

All participants discussed some element of the problem stream, and the role of focusing events acting as catalysts for potential legislative change. Although those residing outside of the UK, were still familiar with some of the PMS and particularly the event-driven nature of some firearms legislation.

In his role as Advisor for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and former head of South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), Ivan, recalled a focusing event that brought attention to firearms, highlighting issues with policy:

"well actually I mean the legislation in the UK was after the, I forgot the name of the place in what was it, '97?"

Participant 6 (P6) is a researcher from Finland who, although unable to refer to them by name, was familiar with examples of the German and UK PMS:

"there's less research, and so we know less about the cases, and they are covered less in the media ... some literature about the cases in Europe such as ones in Germany ... some in the UK"

Similarly, Research Fellow at the Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO) Nic, also did not explicitly mention the name or details of the UK focusing events, although he does discuss the event-driven nature of firearms legislation (see Section 5.4):

"if you look at the UK ... which bit of firearms legislation in the last 30 years wasn't event driven"

Participant 1 (P1) has occupied numerous roles in various law enforcement organisations globally; all of which are involved in researching and responding to firearms in some capacity. Whilst P1 did not refer to any UK PMS, they did

however comment on the nature of UK firearms legislation and the country's reactive response to such incidents. Additionally, noting the UK's event-driven legislative response contrasted with the lack of action in the USA, despite far more serious events.

Reflecting upon how focusing events are responded to, Nils suggests that the UK is an example of a country that others can learn from:

"The UK has really invested in this issue, after the shootings in the 1990s the change in legislation"

Nils acknowledged how focusing events like PMS capture the attention of those in and around government tasked with making policy decisions, giving them the necessary push and driving policy change.

All participants showed an awareness of the UK case studies, with the exception of the Monkseaton shooting (discussed in Section 4.2.3), although this event seldom features in PMS discussions. Martin also referred to the Horden incident, discussed in Section 4.2.9 as it occurred in the domestic setting, rather than a PMS, nonetheless, it resulted in multiple victims, one of whom is Bobby.

As alluded to earlier, participants provided limited commentary or details regarding PMS that occurred outside of the UK. Exceptions to this were typically those participants who resided in the specific countries where non-UK focusing events occurred, Belgium, Germany and Finland. Nils discussed how specific focusing events in Liège and Antwerp drew attention to particular problems. For example, following the Liège shooting loopholes in the country's firearms legislation were revealed; consequently, high-profile incidents acted as catalysts, prompting changes to Belgium's firearms' legislation to address the identified gaps:

"after that shooting there was much more attention in Belgium for illegal firearms ... increased attention for illegal firearms, it also closed a loophole of these historic antique weapons"

However, in the case of Germany, the PMS were mentioned by three participants, none of whom resided there. Ivan acknowledged *"those big ones were in Germany"*. Whilst P6's comment related to their limited knowledge, which was

attributed to less research being available, and consequently *“less was known about the school shootings in Germany”* (P6). Mick on the other hand, discussed his role in the GCN during which time he had spoken with families of children who were victims of the Winnenden PMS. Recalling the interaction, Mick explains how the parents at the time were:

“insistent that it was video games that were the problem, and as well as guns, not to the exclusion of guns in their case”

Mick expressed uncertainty regarding the forces shaping the narrative around the shooting, acknowledging the potential influence of German media outlets and politicians. However, he recognised that individual attitudes and perspectives towards firearms often play a significant role in shaping people’s viewpoints on the issue.

Finland was also mentioned by three participants. Martin and Nic discussed Finland’s cultural relationship with firearms, which they acknowledged contributed to high firearm ownership rates. Nic suggested that whilst Finnish people are generally in favour of preventing PMS, they may not necessarily support more stringent firearm legislation as a practical solution. During their discussion about Finland’s PMS, P6 indicated that the shootings were seen as critical focusing events that indicated a significant issue requiring attention. Although P6 insisted that gun crime *“was not considered a big problem”* beyond the two PMS. P6 stated that politicians and the media framed the Jokela incident, as a single isolated case that was considered more a product of individual and societal factors, rather than part of *“the global mass shooting phenomenon”* (P6). Additionally, despite the subsequent strengthening of Finnish firearms legislation that followed the PMS, they were not framed as part of the broader pattern of indiscriminate mass violence.

The analysis of the interview transcripts revealed how PMS have brought the issue of firearm violence to the forefront of the policy agenda, in certain cases. This aligns with Kingdon’s 1984 concept of focusing events as critical catalysts for policy change within the problem stream, creating windows of opportunity for legislative action.

Problems do not automatically reach the policy agenda just by virtue of their existence, they need to be recognised, defined and framed as problems worthy of attention and action. The recognition of PMS as focusing events by participants across all three groups underscores the importance of considering the problem stream in understanding the policymaking process surrounding firearms legislation. Problem definition could help to explain why certain PMS result in political change, particularly those that do not meet the fatality threshold, whilst the policy and politics streams could help to understand the processes that see certain events result in policy change, as discussed in the following section.

5.4 The Policy Stream

“it’s a temper tantrum for 3-year-olds... rather than stamp their feet and scream, they decided to kill some people before they kill themselves ...I can’t imagine any legislation is going to make somebody who is having that sort of mental episode change their behaviour” (Simon)

Within the problem stream, participants actively acknowledged the pivotal role of focusing events and their ability to draw attention to an issue and consequently create a demand for solutions. This demand, in turn, opens policy windows of opportunity for change, acting as catalysts for potential legislative changes.

The policy stream within the MSF involves the generation, development and evaluation of policy solutions and alternatives to address problems on the government’s agenda. Several participants discussed UK focusing events that drew attention to issues, creating a demand for solutions. Nick, Martin and Simon all commented on Hungerford and Dunblane as two focusing events that raised concerns around firearms control and consequently characterised UK firearms legislation:

“mass public shootings certainly on those scale have kind of triggered a look at legislation ... heightened public awareness and concerns about firearms, and reviews afterwards have found errors that we should take action on, er quite radical action ... banning all automatic weapons in ’88, banning all handguns in ’97, they’re quite radical moves” (Nick)

“all our firearms legislation is event-driven ... ’88 followed Hungerford, the ’97 Act followed Dunblane” (Martin)

“Dunblane, Major’s government caving in banning handguns ... Hungerford, was that Ryan? Wasn’t he using an automatic? I think that led to those being banned” (Simon)

Questioning the efficacy of the response to Hungerford, Mick indicates that the GCN had always argued the changes were not enough, although he expressed more confidence in the solution to Dunblane:

“there’s no doubt that the Dunblane legislation led to huge improvement”

Although it was minimal, participants did provide some commentary detailing those PMS that occurred outside of the UK and were particularly knowledgeable when they occurred in their country of residence. Referring to Finland, P6 mentioned the political processes and public discussions that led to the policy changes following the two shootings, specifically focusing on the tightening of handgun regulations:

“we have the two mass shootings and then after that they wanted to do something about it, so they made various policy changes, erm tried to make changes in a lot of different areas and handgun regulation was one of those”

Nils confirmed that following focusing events in Belgium there were amendments to firearms legislation. He noted the responsive nature and speed of the changes in 2006 and 2011 following the Antwerp and Liège PMS, and another *“public shooting in the streets”* (Nils) that was indicative of loopholes in firearms legislation and demanded a response.

These quotes illustrate how PMS have the potential to bring about positive changes, in line with the policy stream. The discussion of the legislative changes made in response to the PMS and the political framing of these events provides insights into how policy alternatives are generated and how political factors can shape the understanding of and responses to PMS.

The generation of policy alternatives is a selection process, where criteria are imposed for ideas to be selected or not (Kingdon, 1984). This criterion includes, amongst other things: technical feasibility, congruence with the community members, but also anticipation of constraints in the future, such as public

acceptability and the receptivity of politicians (Kingdon, 1984). Another criterion is budget constraints, discussed in Section 5.5 in relation to interest groups.

PMS led to heightened public awareness and concern about firearms, reflecting processes and stakeholder inputs that characterise policy stream progressions. Participants discussed how PMS often directly prompt reviews of existing frameworks identifying specific gaps that new proposals then target. The success of proposals also depends upon how they are received, if the audience is not receptive, should they face opposition, either politically or publicly, the proposals are unlikely to succeed.

Nils discussed a previous attempt to change legislation in Belgium in 2003 that was unsuccessful due to a lack of support. However, consistent with the MSF, certain proposals can gain traction in the aftermath of focusing events and can have the potential to bring about positive changes, when previously they did not receive sufficient support. In 2006, following Antwerp, firearms became *“the hot topic”*, accompanied by a lot of media coverage and specific policy proposals emerged in response to a focusing event that saw a *“targeted response based on the specific context, or the specific characteristics of the shooting”* (Nils), when previously it had lacked support.

The policy stream involves generating and vetting a shortlist of policy alternatives to address problems, that is not to say there is a consensus in the policy community, rather it is confirmation that a number of proposals are prominent (Kingdon, 1984). Participants noted the significance of various actors, including practitioners and academics, and their contributions to the policy formation process. Different actors define the same situation differently, and consequently different solutions exist to any policy issue. P1 emphasised the crucial role of those who shape definitions and the framing of issues and how this can influence the direction of legislative solutions. P6 also commented on how different actors frame PMS *“differently according to their experience, according to their goals and agenda”*. The key question is why one solution is selected over others during the political decision-making process (Hoefer, 2022).

Acknowledging the role of research and expertise in the policy stream, informing policy decisions, and guiding effective policymaking, Graham concurred, although emphasised the need for politicians to possess accurate, detailed information when framing legislation:

“only when governments are actually in possession of all the facts is the legislation likely to be, likely to work, in the way that it is intended to work”

This confirms participants’ understanding that policy entrepreneurs and experts play a crucial role in shaping the policy stream and in providing viable solutions to address issues in the problem stream, in this case, firearms violence.

However, the availability of clear, evidence-based solutions is crucial for effectively addressing firearm violence when policy windows open. Advocating for using evidence-based approaches to inform policy, participants emphasise the importance of evidence evaluation. Nick discussed the very clear policy responses and the role of those working in and around government who are tasked with responding to prevent reoccurrence:

“part of our role is continually assessing whether there are any elements that we think could usefully be strengthened or added to our legislation”

Nils also commented on the importance of evidence-based policy changes and clear strategies to effectively address firearm violence:

“what is important for us, from our perspective, is that at that time as a politician you don’t just make an impulsive choice ... but the policy changes that you propose are based on evidence and based on a clear deliberate policy and a clear strategy”

Participants were also conscious of the need to ensure policies were shaped by evidence rather than gut reactions alone (P1). Nic confirmed the need for research to inform legislative changes in response to events *“rather than just you know, acting reflexively”* (Nic). Similarly, Mick was also clear that it was important to *“respond proactively, rather than reactively”* (Mick), explaining how calm, evidence-based policies might better address the root causes of PMS.

Both Simon and P1 also suggest that when events resulted in rapid changes, and particularly when policy reactions develop hurriedly, it was not always evidence-based:

“it’s knee-jerk ... it’s a response to public outrage” (Simon)

“they don’t take full comprehension of the problem and solution involved so that when knee-jerk legislation goes forward ... chances are you’re going to have to address it again soon or relatively short time later and you’re duplicating work” (P1)

Whilst for Ivan policymaking is either going to happen in that moment:

“because we got a reaction, or people are gonna forget about it”

Ivan, nonetheless, advised against policy reactions developing rapidly, questioning the efficacy and instead arguing that *“it doesn’t necessarily always address the problem”*.

Although Nick felt that this indicated there was support for change:

“just because something is quickly introduced it doesn’t mean to say it’s knee-jerk as such, it just means there’s an appetite for change and the support of parliament to make it happen”

Both Mick and Bobby also discuss the speed of change following focusing events and the balance between responding quickly enough and knee-jerk reactions. Mick discussed an optimum time, after the event, certainly for families and victims. Bobby also felt it was not something that happens straight away *“it’s been dragged out”*. Both Bobby and Mick reference extensive delays around even simple amendments, such as mandating existing licensing guidance use, indicating decision-making challenges even following focusing events and clear solutions. This concern underscores the importance of carefully crafted, evidence-based policy solutions that consider potential unintended consequences, linking to the policy stream of the MSF.

Participants’ insights highlight the interplay between political factors, public sentiment, and evidence-based policy solutions in shaping legislative responses to firearms violence and PMS. The interviews confirmed the ongoing process of

assessing threats and adapting policies, showing the dynamic nature of this stream over time. As discussed by participants, these quotes illustrate attention to key policy stream elements such as alternative generation, evidence evaluation, and implementation feasibility in policy vetting. Participants also emphasise the value of evidence-based policy discussions over reactive responses when policy windows open.

The significance of the policy stream in Kingdon's framework lies in the coupling of viable alternatives, problems and favourable political forces to drive change. The politics stream and the participants' perspectives of the factors that influence the political climate will now be discussed.

5.5 The Politics Stream

"The role of the public, I think, is to maintain a moderate sensible form of government, whether they do that or not is a different matter ... the role of the public is to create the political environment in which public safety can be maintained ... if we elected a far right government, rabid fascist government we would be creating a different political environment ... likewise, if we were to go out and elect members of the Socialist Workers party across the country it would be a very different place" (Graham)

As discussed earlier (Section 2.2.6), the politics stream contains three major components; the political climate and context, key political actors and interest groups, and the impact of political factors on policymaking; all of which can have a significant impact on the policy agenda and the likelihood proposals will be adopted or not, and the participant findings will be discussed accordingly.

5.5.1 Political Climate and Context

"legislators will certainly have the final word ... they can have expertise contributed by practitioners and by academics but ultimately they're the ones who are responsible for change, and they often feed on the public appetite" (P1)

Whilst this quote does touch on the role of key political actors, discussed later in this section, it also underscores how the political climate and context are both critical factors in determining the feasibility of firearms reforms.

Public opinion and political pressure occupy pivotal roles in shaping legislative responses, as commented on by several participants:

“quite important ... for my campaign I tried to get a parliamentary debate, and you needed like 100,000 signatures ... so the public can play a big part in it” (Bobby)

“the public has so much more power than they actually believe they do, elected officials will listen to the public if enough of them are speaking out” (P1)

“politicians should consider the evidence, and you know, a politicians’ job is to get elected and then wield power, so they will have to consider the views of the public” (Simon)

These comments highlight the participants’ views on public sentiment and support as crucial factors capable of significantly influencing the political climate and driving political action on firearms legislation. Shifts in the national mood, often driven by high-profile incidents or changing attitudes, can create opportunities for, or barriers to, legislative action.

PMS are focusing events that can shape the political climate; their occurrence, frequency and subsequent media coverage feeds into and influences public and political reactions to PMS, such as policy proposals and legislative efforts. The role of public opinion in shaping or constraining policy change was discussed by several participants. Nick for example, emphasised how PMS, and the public discourse surrounding them, can instil a sense of urgency into such issue areas:

“when terrible things happen there’s an enormous kind of welling up of public concern about issues and we have to respond to that”

Mick also acknowledged the impact of public opinion on legislative responses following focusing events, in particular the Dunblane shooting:

“well clearly we had the public mood reflected in the Snowdrop petition and other petitions that were running in ’96 and again it was something that could, that the media could respond to, so they could point out that you know there was this amount of definite support amongst the general public”

Whilst Martin, P1 and Nick were cynical as to what extent the public understood, Martin considered the public to possess limited knowledge and understanding of

firearms legislation, which he suggested would increase the likelihood that they would be influenced by the media:

“the public are just led by the media ... 90 plus per cent of people are very much in favour of the gun laws we have, but I don’t think that’s born out of any knowledge of the issue” (Martin)

Similarly, P1 and Nick felt that public awareness and understanding of firearms laws and legislation more broadly tended to be limited:

“the public doesn’t fully understand all that goes into legislative responses” (P1)

“I think the public as a whole know that there are laws on guns and what guns you can have ... but the public awareness about legislation as a whole is not particularly great. I think firearms is just part of that overall kind of lack of awareness of how the law works” (Nick)

The role of shifting public pressure and fluctuating attention in the context of the politics stream was also discussed. Noting the fickle nature of public interest and difficulty capturing and then maintaining attention, beyond initial outrage, P1 referred to public engagement around issues like PMS eventually receding as new issues emerge, despite strong initial reactions:

“the public often loses the appetite for the fight; they move on to other things”

Public attention can shift rapidly and when it does policy windows open and close. This observation aligns with the politics stream’s emphasis on the fleeting nature of policy windows that can quickly close when public priorities shift, media coverage wanes and a sense of urgency dissipates. Understanding the political climate and context is crucial for analysing how these factors influence the policymaking process and the efficacy of firearms legislation.

Politicians feel pressure to respond to public concerns and demonstrate that they are taking action, and the media’s influence in shaping the national political climate is widely acknowledged by the participants. Graham, Bobby and Simon recognised the media’s pivotal role in framing public concerns, noting their impact on the broader political landscape:

“I think the media plays quite a significant role actually” (Graham)

“I think they play a big role in it the media, in my experience they play a big part” (Bobby)

“It’s almost entirely due to the media” (Simon)

Simon acknowledged their role in framing PMS, however argued they were only capable of blowing things up into sensational headlines and consequently were unhelpful in respect of affecting legislative responses:

“the ridiculous knee-jerk stuff that happens is complete bollocks”

Mick also discussed the role of the media in shaping responses to PMS, asserting that post Dunblane the legislative changes would not have occurred to the extent that they did without:

“a combination of the media, the campaigns, and certain political voices”

Likewise, Nick and Nils commented on the pivotal role of the media in increasing the likelihood there will be a legislative response:

“if we want new laws, it’s got to pass through parliament ... there’s got to be support amongst politicians to get change happening and ... it’s shaped by public concern shaped by media reporting ... and that all feeds through to provide the kind of context where change happens” (Nick)

“change in legislation was of course very well much media driven, because of the public anxiety” (Nils)

Although Nils advised caution against rushed policy changes that can occur when public anxiety and media coverage combine, this was also echoed by other participants and will be discussed later when exploring the impact of political factors on policymaking

5.5.2 Key Political Actors

Political will and public opinion are pivotal factors that influence legislative responses to firearms crimes and PMS. Interest group advocacy and the balance of power between different stakeholders can have a significant impact on the political dynamics. Participants offered their perspectives on how political factors

can shape the understanding of and responses to PMS. Nick discussed political will and the role of politics in responding, noting:

“there’s great appetite amongst politicians, both as Minister and in parliament to make changes to try and stop that kind of awful thing happening again”

Key political actors including political parties and elected officials, interest groups, and the media play significant roles in shaping the legislative landscape around firearms and PMS. The political framing of these events provides insights into how policy alternatives are generated, as highlighted by P6 during their discussion of the Finnish school shootings:

“politicians, for instance framed the Finnish cases especially the first one as a single isolated case that is not part of the mass shooting phenomenon”

Politicians can frame PMS in ways that shape public understanding and policy responses. However, it is not just how events are framed, of equal importance are the roles and influences of key factors such as shifts in power dynamics or alliances; and how interests and agendas align or conflict. In the epigraph, Graham’s comment on political parties and elected officials, emphasises their role in shaping the political landscape, and what factors might lead to a shift in the landscape, in this case selecting a different party.

Mick offered a first-hand perspective on political actors and their influence, and how it has shifted over time in relation to firearms policy:

“we are part of the people who they are prepared to discuss things with ... whereas 20 years ago we found it very difficult to get involved, get meetings with the Home Office for example, whereas now, relatively frequently we are part of the people who they are prepared to discuss things with, whereas 20 years ago they were only listening to the police and the gun enthusiasts”

This highlights an important change in the landscape of organised political actors engaged in firearms policymaking. Graham also noted the profound impact that shifts in partisan control can have, when reflecting on the legislative amendments enacted in response to Hungerford and Dunblane (discussed in Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.4):

“if you go back to '97, you had the number one Act and then as soon as the Labour Party won the election you had the number two Act, one was a prohibition on small calibre, sorry, centre fire pistols, and that was succeeded by a prohibition on all pistols”

Electoral outcomes and changes in political power are able to rapidly reshape the legislative landscape, with new governments often seeking to differentiate themselves through sweeping policy changes. They may be key actors capable of enacting meaningful legislative changes, however, *“they can only go so far”* (P1). Powerful interest groups can block or delay policy changes, the Gun Line initiative (see Section 5.5.2) is just one such example.

While changing political landscapes can reduce the momentum for policy change, persistent advocacy from interest groups can maintain pressure for reform. The alignment of political interests and the balance of power between competing advocacy groups can significantly shape the trajectory of firearms legislation. The ability of interest groups to influence policy debates, key political figures and decisionmakers can determine the success or failure of legislative initiatives, and this emerged across the participant interviews.

Mick commented on the importance of lobbying and specifically strengthening firearms legislation as an issue that needs fairly constant pushing to:

“remind politicians to resist listening to voices who are saying it doesn't work and again it's the need for this regular reminding which only a lobby group can really do”

Mick explained how the GCN was established not just to improve gun control in the years following the handgun ban, but to also make sure the handgun ban did not get rolled back.

The role of interest groups and political considerations in shaping legislative responses to PMS was also discussed by Nic and Ivan, who noted that gun lobby organisations can have a significant impact on slowing down or influencing legislative changes. P1 also felt that the gun control lobby could be successful *“if the public appetite is such”*.

Bobby and Mick considered the influence of gun control and gun rights lobby groups on legislative responses to PMS, Bobby agreed they had *“a big impact, a big impact”*, whilst Mick suggested things could stagnate without some involvement:

“It’s difficult to be objective on this but I would say very important, we’re the ones who keep reminding politicians and nudging the media about the need to do things” (Mick)

The balance of power between gun rights and gun control advocacy groups can significantly impact the direction and outcomes of legislative efforts (discussed in Section 6.4.1). Participants commented on the strength of the gun rights lobby in comparison to the gun control lobby. Nick acknowledged the GCN as an anti-gun lobby, however despite regular discussions with them was nonetheless, cynical of the need for them:

“we don’t have a really strong anti-gun lobby as such, because there doesn’t need to be one ... legislation is already pretty tight”

Whilst Martin was cynical regarding the impact of gun control lobby groups, he nonetheless, acknowledged they could potentially influence legislative responses:

“I don’t think it, it really does have a particularly big effect ...the idea in the UK that any shooting organisation ... I think they have influence ... but it’s only influence”

Simon was also less favourable of gun control groups, in his view:

“the anti-shooting bunch are immensely well organised, professional in their use of lobbyists etc and meddlers of misinformation”

Ivan similar to Simon acknowledged how gun control lobby organisations generally, are quite well organised, however, considered the gun rights, hunting and gun owners lobby to be *“actually significantly more organised”* (Ivan) but also well-funded (see Section 5.5.3).

Bobby reflects on his experience of lobbying and campaigning for the ‘Gun Line’ initiative, which was shut down within several day of it going live, due to pressure from the shooting community:

"I campaigned for years, eventually got it and it got abolished, and I got told I wasn't allowed to put that in the media ... cos David Cameron didn't want it, him and his pals were threatened by it, that goes to show like obviously the gun lobby, massively ... that's how strong the candidates, it was up and running live it was in the public eye and it just vanished, it disappeared, so that's how powerful they can be"

Similarly, Nick acknowledged the influence of the gun rights lobby:

"clearly the gun lobby is the kind of shooting organisations, of which there are a number ... and they may think they're to try and protect what they have already ... they try and influence parliamentarians and ministers, but not more than any other lobby group does"

P1 also discussed the influence of the gun ownership lobby and firearms interest groups on legislative responses, noting that they played an important role and at times were successful, however:

"in countries where there is strong firearms ownership culture ... they are only as strong as the public appetite, and unless that changes, they're not succeeding"

This sentiment was echoed by Nils, who agreed that often there is a large gun owners lobby and gun trade/industry representation that has an effect and *"sadly somethings have public support"* when others do not.

Participants all discussed the power of lobby groups, but often how the gun rights, hunting and sports shooting lobby tend to have more influence, particularly outside of the UK.

Nils explained that, unlike the relatively less influential interest groups in the UK, countries with strong gun cultures or traditions outside of the UK will have a significant impact on shaping legislative outcomes in respect of firearms:

"especially in gun countries, as I sometimes call them, they have quite a big impact ... where of course there is a big gun tradition of hunting for example ... it was only after the shooting in Antwerp ... Belgium is a gun country, so a lot of interest groups have played an important role in trying to stall this more restrictive legislation"

This highlights the role of interest groups in shaping firearms legislation in Belgium, where previously there was very little movement on the issue. Nic, in agreement with Nils, acknowledged the strength of the gun rights lobby:

“at European level, pretty strong ...they quite effectively watered down the proposed ban on semi-automatic rifles, through you know, traditional, you know lobbying”

Interest groups play a crucial role in shaping the political landscape surrounding firearms legislation, especially in countries with deep-rooted gun traditions. The participants' comments highlight their agreement that gun rights lobby groups tend to wield greater power and influence in those nations with established gun cultures.

Support for gun control measures yet an understanding of the need to consider the legitimate interests and concerns of gun rights advocates was expressed by some participants. Martin recognised the value in consulting with lobby groups, both for and against, and the importance of hearing *“all sides of the arguments”*. Ivan, similarly, discussed balancing the rights between lobby groups on both sides:

“we are responsible citizens ... we follow the legislation ...you should not ostracise, you know, because of what people do with legal weapons”

Simon and Bobby acknowledged the need for firearms control, yet were both opposed to banning firearms, noting the importance of distinguishing between gun control and anti-shooting:

“well, there’s gun control and there’s anti-shooting ... I would probably argue I am in favour of gun control, but I’m against banning guns” (Simon)

Reflecting on his individual experience, Bobby shared how there were clearly certain expectations regarding his personal circumstances and his perspective regarding firearms:

“when I’m campaigning, they don’t get the point, I’m on the fence on both sides ... I’m a victim who has lost someone to mass murder, but I love shooting”

Speaking on behalf of a lobby group Graham discussed his role within BSSC, and the need for balance between maintaining public safety whilst protecting the rights of those who wish to continue with their hobbies/sports. According to Graham:

“the role of politics I think is to take account of both the needs of the wider public but also the needs of specific groups, and to erm understand and to make a decision when those the rights or responsibilities of either party are being infringed”

Mick also recalled similar sentiments following Dunblane:

“for some taking their handguns away was the worst thing that could happen, which required the more rational, more sane voices within the shooting community to say there was something wrong with what happened at Dunblane”

However, as Martin pointed out, there is *“no rational debate when it comes to these things”*.

Participants highlight the role of key political actors as significant factors within the politics stream, noting their perceived influence shaping the political discourse and decision-making process. The influences and interactions of these key political actors, along with the alignment or conflict of their interests and agendas, have a substantial impact on the policymaking process and the resulting firearms legislation. These quotes illustrate how public opinion, the media, lobby organisations, and political dynamics collectively shape the legislative landscape concerning firearms and PMS. These insights contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing policymaking in response to such events.

5.5.3 The Impact of Political Factors on Policy Making

The third component of the politics stream is the impact of political factors on policymaking; this ties together how these political elements ultimately shape the firearms debate and the policymaking process and outcomes.

Participants highlighted how shifts in party control and the composition of key governing bodies substantially influence the policymaking landscape and the direction of firearms legislation. Changes within the legislative administration, such as elections, shifts in political party control, turnover of key personnel, and

variations in funding, can all influence policymaking and the effectiveness of firearms legislation.

Graham's earlier comments in the epigraph illustrate how electoral changes in administration can dramatically reshape the political environment and policy direction. Reflecting specifically on Dunblane, he observed that the legislative response was influenced by the political cycle and the imminent elections, noting that politicians were making promises to secure votes:

"in the case of Dunblane, you had a struggling Conservative government which was on its last legs, and you had a situation where ... Michael Howard said we will do this and Tony Blair said we will do that ... because we want you to vote for us because the election is coming up very soon, so the whole thing then becomes very political"

Political competition and electoral consideration led to a bidding up of policy proposals, with rival parties trying to outdo each other in their responses to public concerns, aligning with Kingdon's concept of how political factors can shape not just whether policy change occurs, but the nature and extent of that change.

Bobby reflected on his experiences and the challenges of working with changing political administrations due to shifts in political positions:

"my experience was you can go to a Home Office meeting be backed 110% off a politician they will promise you the world, then in two months' time ... that politician will step down or move up and then another politician will come in and he'll have a complete different view on what the last politician promised you, and you're just fighting a losing battle"

The shifting priorities and perspective of incoming political leaders can create challenges for advocates seeking to advance their legislative agenda, illustrating how changes in political personnel can disrupt policy momentum.

Reflecting on his experience, Mick also noted the role of political factors in shaping legislative responses:

"well clearly we need the politicians to make changes ... a lot of subsequent changes that have occurred all of which I would say have been positive ones that have been prompted perhaps by us, organisations like GCN"

pushing the policies and rather than politicians saying this is going on we need to do something about it now”

Political will, or lack thereof, and the influence of advocacy groups can impact policy outcomes and legislative responses. Building support and consensus among stakeholders to get acts prioritised, and overcome obstacles to passing legislation, requires strong evidence and public appetite. P1 noted how the role of the public was:

“similar to the media, not necessarily an awareness but in applying pressure or in voicing their concerns, whether from being a victim or just advocate ... and seeing that the elected officials carry through”

However, P1 also acknowledged their limited ability to change opinions:

“the opinion has to come from the electorate, they can be the voice of the electorate, but they don’t have the power to change the officials mind, if the electorate doesn’t, it isn’t part of the discussion”

It is not just what brings about change, but what impedes it. Mick noted that in the case of the UK, it was:

“the apparent close relationship between senior members of the ruling party and the sport of shooting that impeded the development and implementation of firearms legislation in the UK”

The political environment directly shapes and constrains the policymaking process.

As a senior civil servant in the Home Office, Nick is aware of the factors that can make the process of implementing legislation more difficult, and appreciates the challenges in finding parliamentary time:

“I’m not saying we don’t have time to legislate but within government it always is a massive discussion between departments, to try to find the right bill, to get the bill before parliament and to get on the list ... takes a lot of arguing and debating and you need really good evidence and a lot of people’s support to get onto the list and that comes back down to ... is there a kind of public appetite for change?”

P1 also touched upon how political changes can impact firearms legislation, noting the challenges of maintaining policy momentum, particularly without support.

These perspectives confirm how changes in political personnel or landscapes can affect policy continuity and implementation. They highlight the key political dynamics that shape the feasibility and trajectory of policy change, such as competing demands and negotiations between government departments to secure limited parliamentary time.

In addition to the role, influence and turnover of key personnel, participants agree that funding is a crucial political factor that can shape how firearms legislation is developed and implemented. P1 acknowledges the role of funding in lobbying, noting:

“it doesn’t matter what their numbers are, whether they’re at 60% of the populace or at 40% it doesn’t really matter what their number is if they don’t have the money to influence change”

Funding is also mentioned by Ivan, who notes how organisations that are well-funded have more power:

“the power of the hunting lobby ... the gun owners lobby and different organisations etc. it’s quite strongly advocated, the difference is they tend to be actually significantly more organised ... often well-funded”

Martin discussed how politicians have to “*compete against the financial interests of others*” and often funding can act as a barrier to other groups, particularly those who do not have the same resources. The balance of political forces, and relative power of different interest groups can impact the likelihood of policy solutions being adopted. Mick commented on the strength and lobbying power of the gun rights groups in Britain, noting the development of legislation was impeded by:

“the apparent close relationship between senior members of the ruling party and the sport of shooting”

Financial resources and the lobbying capabilities of key political actors are critical factors within the politics stream that affect the likelihood and direction of policy outcomes. The NRA features in participant discussions relating to lobbying power, Martin and Nick both discussed the amount of money and the associated influence it brings:

“because of the amount of money it has, the lobbying power that it has, it is very difficult to not be influenced by them” (Martin)

“the NRA has infiltrated the political process in the states” (Mick)

The participants' insights map closely onto Kingdon's conceptualisation of the politics stream; illuminating how the alignment of interests among key actors and political factors, such as funding and leadership can significantly affect the implementation and effectiveness of firearms legislation. The process of making new laws is competitive, with different government departments competing for limited time in parliament. Changes in political leadership or the overall political landscape can disrupt policy progress. Turnover of key political figures can reset policy discussions, impeding progress even when initial support seems strong. These factors collectively influence the development and execution of firearms legislation, often leading to challenges in maintaining consistent policy approaches over time. This volatility in the political environment underscores the complexity of enacting and sustaining meaningful legislative changes in firearms policy. Navigating this complex political landscape is central to understanding the dynamics surrounding firearms legislation.

5.6 Summary

The participants' insights and experiences align with key concepts from Kingdon's MSF, organised around the three streams: problem, policy and politics. The participants' accounts shed light on the critical role of the streams in shaping the legislative landscape around firearms and PMS, and policy windows in creating opportunities for change. This chapter has presented the findings from the 11 participants. Their reflections reinforce the framework's emphasis on the complex interplay between problem recognition, solution/alternative availability and political receptiveness in determining when and how policy change can advance. Having discussed the participant findings that underscore the importance of aligning the three streams to capitalise on these fleeting moments of opportunity, the next chapter will explore those themes that emerged inductively during the data analysis around definitional, cultural, and social complexities/contexts.

Chapter 6 : Emerging Themes

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore how public mass shootings (PMS) are defined, framed and responded to across Europe, and the impact upon firearms legislation. One of the key objectives is to develop an in-depth understanding of perspectives of PMS. This section builds upon the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) analysis presented in the previous chapter and explores the additional inductive themes that emerged from the participant interviews. The inductive themes highlight the complex interplay of factors that influence policy responses to PMS and the need for a more nuanced and context-specific approach to understanding and addressing these events. Chapter 6 will merely present the themed comments and narratives of the participants, rather than offering any analysis, whilst the discussion in Chapter 7 will synthesise the findings from the participants with the existing literature and in doing so will present the analysis of the interviews.

The following chapter is structured around the key themes that emerged from the 11 interviews. Participants' perspectives will be presented to illustrate the findings, organised around four themes: (1) Contextualising PMS and the hierarchy of death; (2) The role of the media and the unintended consequences; (3) Societal, cultural and political factors on firearms policy and, (4) Surviving PMS; the long-term effects on victims and families. These themes provide a comprehensive overview of the various factors and considerations that shape the understanding of and responses to PMS, beyond the MSF.

6.2 The Complexity of Defining and Categorising Mass Shootings

As discussed previously, PMS are a broad concept and there are considerable differences in how they are defined and consequently, understood; indeed Section 2.1.4 addressed the significant definitional ambiguity. The findings from the participant interviews will now be presented to understand how participants conceptualise and define these events. Their insights reveal the complexities in categorising PMS and illustrate how varying definitions impact policy responses

and public understanding, highlighting the need for a more consistent and comprehensive approach in order to adequately address this issue.

Ivan highlights the variations in how PMS are categorised and understood across different regions and how this can influence both the perceived prevalence and consequently, determine what is an appropriate response to PMS in different contexts. Similarly, P1 and Nick also acknowledged the challenges of defining and categorising PMS, noting the fact there is often a fatality threshold:

“two or more fatalities, others begin at three ... I don’t know that there’s a general definition” (P1)

“that’s one of the things about this, is what do you define as a public mass shooting, is it more than one person at the same time with the same gun, I don’t know” (Nick)

Participants also commented on the nature of the attacks, Martin noted “the indiscriminate nature of it is always a factor”. P6 and Martin also acknowledged that in addition to multiple victims, it is the random nature of the attacks:

“Multiple victims ... also that they are random, the victims and the selection of the victims are random, it’s random” (P6)

“I think the recurring theme is the attacks, either a large number of people or they are random in the element, there’s no knowledge of the victims ... although if you look at obviously Dunblane, there perhaps was a more of a clear, clear, clearly defined target there” (Martin)

This lack of a universally agreed-upon definition can have an impact on how these events are understood, responded to, and researched. The participant interviews recognised the terminology complexities, uncertainty about exact definitions, and the limitations of existing definitions based on fatality counts (P6, Nils, Mick, Bobby); noting that the key influences on the perceived severity often centre on the age of the victim, as noted by Martin:

“when you look at Dunblane, clearly the age was a massive factor”

Nils also discussed a hierarchy of victims based on factors such as age, race and perceived innocence that can influence public reactions and polarise certain shootings. The number of victims as a defining factor was a common theme

across participant interviews, with many commenting on fatality thresholds and what Greenslade (1998) termed the “hierarchy of death”.

6.2.1 The Hierarchy of Death

“one dead fireman in Brooklyn is worth five English bobbies, who are worth 50 Arabs, who are worth 500 Africans” (Moeller, 1999)

Noting the limitations of existing definitions based on fatality counts, and the factors that affect their perceived severity, Mick commented on how those shootings that do not meet the arbitrary fatality threshold are ignored:

“because they happen to be individual or in one or two rather than on a scale as we had in Dunblane and elsewhere”

Similarly, P6, Mick, and Bobby also discuss fatality thresholds and the number of victims, highlighting the need for a more inclusive definition of PMS:

“the number of the victims ... the age and the race and the class of the victims seems to matter ... it seems to be perceived as more severe” (P6)

“however many victims there are and whatever happens to the victims, it can still be a major event, if it’s one death or 16” (Mick)

“multiple murder, it’s just somebody opening fire and killing as many people as they possibly can ... I’d personally say anything over one is classed as a mass” (Bobby)

Emphasising the significance of each life beyond the fatality count, Simon also agreed that *“any one is a tragedy”*, stating that even a single death can still constitute a major event and the need to consider the broader impact on victims and communities. Noting the uncertainties around conceptualising and addressing PMS, and the challenges in establishing a clear, consistent definition, their perspectives emphasise the importance of a more inclusive and nuanced understanding, considering the experiences of all victims and survivors. The following section will discuss the next theme, the role of the media in shaping public discourse and policy outcomes.

6.3 The Role of Media in Shaping Public Discourse and Policy Responses

“A lot of people in Hungerford would say the same thing, that they were absolutely, you know, harried and pestered to within an inch of their life by journalists” (Martin)

Debates around firearms control move through the policy agenda, often driven by support from the public and media. As powerful agenda setters the media are able to construct and frame PMS, which can affect how they are perceived by the public and consequently how they are responded to.

P1 acknowledged the critical role of the media in bringing attention to an issue:

“the media frames really, I mean that’s the first issue in sort of notification of such an incident ... responsible media shows the incident for what it is, because awareness, nothing can change without awareness ... what’s happened in the UK and other areas is because of the response of the media and the public”

Mick, Martin and Bobby discussed public perceptions and policy response to PMS, noting the significant influence of media coverage:

“without a combination of the media, the campaigns and certain political voices, the legislative changes wouldn’t have occurred to the extent that they did” (Mick)

“media drives public concern, the public are just led by the media ... it’s dominated by media leading the public ... gun control, there was no real debate, it was just driven by the media” (Martin)

“the media do play a big part in things ... it’s all down to the media” (Bobby)

PMS often generate considerable media interest, Mick discussed the role of media in shaping political responses, commenting on the emotional outpouring following Dunblane:

“it feels like the politicians are responding to how the media are reporting it ... it is the very emotional, very emotive response of the media that tends, that I feel tends to drive things ... it feels like everybody is reacting to things, erm, rather than doing it, doing things, as they often say we shouldn’t respond emotionally to an event like this”

This quote highlights how media coverage can fuel public outrage and pressure policymakers to take swift action, even if the resulting policies may not be evidence-based or fully address the underlying issues.

Noting the role of the media in shaping how PMS are framed, Simon and Graham acknowledged the pervasive sensationalism in media coverage leading to excessive attention:

“it’s in the interests of the media to blow these things up ... not out of proportion, but to blow these things up into sensational headlines” (Simon)

“blow these things up out of proportion ... into sensational headlines” (Graham)

Bobby likewise appreciated the media’s value but remained cynical, reflecting how from his perspective:

“they can be helpful, and obviously I know they can be a pain in the arse”

The significant influence of the media in creating a sense of panic and driving policy changes, following PMS, was also discussed by Ivan:

“I do think that you know, this kind of panic the media creates and this demand by citizens to do something about, it leads you to having to amend legislation very quickly, just to kind of show that you’re responding to this, so I think the media’s role is crucial and I think a lot of it is about ... educating the media around the effects”

This suggests that media coverage often focuses on sensationalism rather than a deeper understanding of the issues, this can lead to knee-jerk reactions from politicians seeking to satisfy public demand for action.

The potential impact of media framing on policy debates highlights the need for responsible reporting, as noted by P1 the onus is on the media to ensure responsible, accurate reporting that *“shows the incident for what it is”*. Building on Simon’s earlier comment regarding media sensationalism, participants criticised aspects of media coverage promoting PMS, noting the potential unintended consequences.

6.3.1 Unintended Consequences of Media Coverage

All participants mentioned the role of the media in shaping public discourse and driving policy responses to PMS and expressed varying levels of concern regarding the potential unintended consequences of media coverage.

Mick suggested that media coverage can sometimes perpetuate myths and distract from the underlying issues of firearm violence. A view echoed by Nic, who during his interview suggested that there was a “*certain mythology*” although he was cynical of the extent of this outside of the USA.

Nonetheless, participants concurred that the media had the potential to affect how mass shooters were perceived by the public:

“the media I’d say has a much greater effect in terms of encouraging people ... creating role models that people want to emulate, I’d say that comes from news media” (Nic)

“where the media have to be careful is that they don’t present the perpetrator in some kind of heroic fashion in a way that might cause somebody to might want to emulate them” (Nick)

Nic, P1 and Martin also understood the need for responsible reporting, commenting on those perpetrators who were seeking fame or notoriety:

“wants to go out in a blaze of publicity” (Nic)

“a number of places won’t harp on about the individuals so that they get this fame out of it” (P1)

“if there was no publicity at all ... then they would stop, people do it because they want to go out in a blaze of glory” (Martin)

Noting that the unintended consequences extended beyond perpetrators choosing to kill themselves in a way that would make them infamous, participants were conscious of the wider impact; Simon, Nils, Nic and Nick observed that widespread coverage and attention can produce both contagion effects and copycat incidents: (discussed in Section 4.2.5)

“do I think there is a danger of copycat activity, probably” (Simon)

“copycat can play a role, and the media then definitely has a role to play there as well” (Nils)

“sort of media phenomenon ... copycat activity, are people being inspired by media coverage and are people motivated to try to, you know, to get themselves on the media and become famous” (Nic)

“the media through their reporting of things put seeds in people’s minds ... you can see copycat acts as a result of people mimicking what they have read or seen in the media” (Nick)

Although Nick was cynical the extent to which this applied, at least in the context of the UK:

“I’m not saying that applies, doesn’t apply elsewhere in the world, I suspect the United States there might be some of that”

Bobby likewise acknowledged the role of copycat and contagion effects in the USA, suggesting that there is some kind of one-upmanship when young teenagers read about other mass shooters and try to compete against each other:

“he killed 30 people: I’m going to go into this college with this type of machine gun ... a better machine gun than somebody else’s, and I’m gonna kill more people”

In addition to highlighting the potential influence of the media on copycat and contagion effects, participants observed that the unintended consequences can overshadow the impact on victims and families. The participants argued that the media must not only exercise caution in how they portray the perpetrator, to avoid glamourising them, they must be cognisant of the need for sensitive, victim-centred reporting.

Nick notes that the focus is often on the perpetrator and their motivations, before eventually turning towards the victims, survivors and families, who then become the primary concern:

“in terms of the impact upon them, after the initial furore of, you know, interest in the shooter, I think it’s then more on the families and the impact on the survivors”

Participants advocated for victim-centred reporting, highlighting the various ways the media might neglect to consider certain perspectives, or fall short in

addressing the needs of those most affected by PMS, and as such requiring considerate, sensitive reporting. The quote by Martin in the epigraph touches on how the media can negatively impact victims of PMS and highlights the importance of responsible behaviour around media reporting. Similarly, Mick acknowledged that post Dunblane, media reporting was crucial and had the potential to amplify the victims' voices during policy debates.

Despite their reservations, participants understood the need for media reporting, as discussed by Nick and Mick:

“you can’t really restrict reporting ... it’s a public interest that it’s reported as fully as possible” (Nick)

“they can’t fail to report things, and therefore can’t be blamed if somebody picks up on incidents and then decides to copy them ... so I’m not sure whether there is a link that can be drawn with respect of the media not encouraging copycat” (Mick)

Graham, similarly, understood the need for media reporting, although emphasised the importance of ensuring accurate reporting:

“the media plays quite a significant role actually; the media doesn’t necessarily always have the correct facts”

Whilst Ivan concurred that the media occupied a crucial role, he suggested their limitations were due to a lack of understanding, rather than a lack of accurate facts:

“the media tends to misunderstand the real problem and focuses on the bigger big you know big headlines, things instead of actually looking at what could be done, is there anything that can be done, what are the issues”

Ivan suggested media coverage often focuses on sensationalism rather than a deeper understanding of the issues, and in doing so can create a sense of panic that can lead to knee-jerk reactions from politicians seeking to satisfy public demand for action, when instead what was important was focusing on “*educating the media around the effects*”.

Participant interviews underscored the role of the media in shaping public perception and policy responses, and the need for sensitive, victim-centred

reporting. Moving beyond the unintended consequences of media coverage, it is essential to consider the broader social and cultural factors that shape the context in which these events occur and are interpreted, as discussed in Section 6.4.

6.4 The Impact of Societal and Cultural Factors on Firearms Policy

“If you grow up in a household where guns are important then that’s where you’re gonna go, and if not, you’re the other side of the argument that says guns promote violence” (P1)

The development and implementation of firearms policy is influenced by a complex interplay of societal, cultural and political factors; all of which shape public attitudes, political will and responses towards firearms and the likelihood of policy change following PMS. One of the key themes that emerged from the participant data, rather than imposed by the existing MSF, was the impact of the cultural, and societal factors.

Although cultural attitudes towards firearms and gun cultures are related concepts, they are not identical; cultural attitudes encompass society-wide perspectives on gun ownership, use and regulation, whereas gun cultures represent more specific manifestations of these broader cultural attitudes (Shapira, Liang and Lin, 2021). The participant interviews highlighted how these cultural attitudes can influence public views on firearms but also impact the political viability of different policy proposals, this underscores the importance of considering both society’s overarching perspectives as well as context-specific expressions of those attitudes when developing firearms legislation.

As indicated by P1 in the epigraph, for some cultures, the normalisation of firearms begins at a young age, reflecting on his own experience as a child, P1 recalls:

“people were shooting guns, and I see it constantly on TV, can I see how it can be an influence on certain people, yes”

Public opinion, societal norms and overarching cultural values shape how firearms are perceived, and consequently firearms availability and ownership. Societal factors, such as firearms availability, influence the occurrence of PMS, as noted by P1, Ivan and Martin:

“the availability of firearms has something to do with it, and that's where it starts” (P1)

“availability of weapons, plus this kind of culture that weapons are cool, that you know, going and shooting is a cool thing” (Ivan)

“the ubiquitous nature of firearms in the States I think clearly does contribute, and their approach is, they just don't seem to be prepared to any compromise at all” (Martin)

Nick also comments on the USA, arguing they are *“the ultimate kind of gun culture place”* and other countries do not experience the same kind of issues.

Contrasting societal views on firearms and violence across national contexts and the influence of cultural and political factors shape responses to PMS. Nils concurred also noting the difference in the American situation:

“where the gun culture is really part of society ... it's very normal, where an 18-year-old boy can have 30-40 firearms, it's normal”

Nic also comments on the USA and the *“notion of aggressive individualism accompanied by firearms”*, noting how there is much less of that kind of culture in Europe, particularly associated with firearms. Nic notes the cultural differences in attitudes towards firearms:

“the far lower levels of public mass shootings in Europe compared to the US or similar places like Australia, Japan, etc. Canada, alright partly it's legislation but partly it's the overall culture and ... the extent to which people, you know use violence and use guns”

Thus, suggesting that the lower levels of gun violence in Europe cannot be attributed solely to legislation, and instead, reflects differences in overall culture and attitudes towards firearms and violence.

Martin also acknowledges the difficulty in bringing about change, noting the pervasive American gun culture and belief in the right to bear arms that has consistently hindered attempts to introduce stricter firearms regulations, even after a PMS:

“guns in America I think are so ingrained in their society and their culture that it would be like turning around and saying I think all cars should be

banned because of the number of people who are killed in car accidents ... you wouldn't ban cars, but they kill people, why would you ban firearms? Which is an interesting cultural thing"

The differing societal views and cultural factors around firearms ownership and control influence outcomes and perspectives of firearms, Nils highlights the broader societal context influencing firearms policy:

"I think gun culture plays a role ... I think people who are very much into gun culture by definition become shooters ... that's the way gun culture plays a role there"

Martin and Ivan also discuss the role of various cultural attitudes:

"there are cultural things as well ... it's a big hunting culture and Finland is one of the most heavily armed populations in the world" (Martin)

"we have a gun culture in the Balkans; it's the normal thing ... a house is not a home without a gun" (Ivan)

Whilst participants all discussed the notion of a gun culture in varying respects, they were nonetheless critical of the use of the term gun culture, Graham, Nic, Ivan and Nick all expressed their scepticism of the term:

"I question use of the term gun culture ... if I were to speak to the let's say Home Affairs correspondent of the Guardian and I talked about gun culture; a set of criteria would immediately establish themselves in his mind ... it means totally different things to different people" (Graham)

"quite critical of the term, overall, in terms of it just ending up being some all-encompassing blob which people blame everything on ... if we forget about the term gun culture, if there's sort of elements of culture which relate to guns" (Nic)

"it's questionable whether there even is something that you can define as gun culture ... definitely in Europe, you don't have a gun culture" (Ivan)

"I don't think we have a gun culture; there's a kind of sport shooting culture" (Nick)

This illustrates how even the term 'gun culture' can evoke different meanings and stereotypes for people, emphasising the importance of understanding the diverse contexts and identities associated with firearms ownership.

Acknowledging various types of gun cultures, participants commented on cultural attitudes where firearms play significant roles. Simon discussed the diversity of gun cultures in the UK:

“well, it depends what you mean by, I suppose how do you define gun culture ... is there a gun culture amongst people who I know, who go pheasant shooting ... is there a gun culture there? yes of course there is, because we all have guns”

Confirming his knowledge of and involvement in various shooting activities, Graham discussed the nuances of what he sees as one variety of gun culture:

“the culture related to target shooting ... my son shoots for the British Army ... he lives in a gun culture ... military culture, people who work and live in the armed services have a distinct culture”

Additionally, noting the environment he lives in and the associated gun culture surrounding field sports:

“I have a gun culture; my gun culture is field sports ... deer stalking ... wild fowling”

Graham also goes on to acknowledge the gun cultures that exist outside of the more legitimate organised shooting activities or groups, noting that:

“there may well be a gun culture in drugs gangs”

Simon and Nick likewise distinguished between the culture surrounding organised shooting activities and specific subcultures associated with criminal activity often in urban areas:

“so there is a gun culture there but it doesn’t, I don’t see that associated at all with public mass shootings, is the gun culture that there might be in part of Moss Side, my friends up there tell me that there is ... using the definition of gun culture, but I don’t know what it is ‘cos I don’t live there, I’m not young and I don’t hang around in those particular groups” (Simon)

“in some sectors of society here, but it’s not a sector which glorifies guns as such, it’s more about the sport, more about the clay pigeon shooting, it’s more about you know, shooting well pheasants or whatever it may be as opposed to a culture where people look up and aspire to having a gun and, and using it to enforce their status in society, I don’t see that here, I’m not sure the same applies elsewhere” (Nick)

Participants' insights underscore the notion of a 'gun culture' that is often tied into ideas of groups using firearms to enforce their status in society, indeed Bobby distinguishes between two gun cultures:

"obviously you've got guns in the countryside, and guns in the street, gangs ... that's what's always over the news, black gangs in London, or farmers in the countryside, is there a difference?"

Although later Bobby acknowledges that they are two distinct cultures, and similar to Ivan discussed how the associated behaviours of one of those cultures are underpinned by safety concerns:

"it's like two completely different kind of cultures ... inner city gun culture ... countryside culture, you're brought up around it ... brought up around gun safety ... it's like never do this, never do that" (Bobby)

"in places like the Nordic countries, where there is a significant part of the culture is about hunting ... what's also interesting about the gun culture is the culture of safety" (Ivan)

The participants' comments emphasise the distinction between legal and illegal firearms use and highlight how those safety concerns are only associated with one type of gun culture.

Whilst Mick does not mention gun cultures, he did discuss firearms crime, differentiating between legal and illegal:

"largely within a metropolitan area, which relates to gangs and drugs ... and criminal activity largely, almost entirely with illegal weapons"

Although Mick did acknowledge that most of the UK PMS have involved legal weapons.

Notions of gun cultures frequently generate images of those associated with drugs and crime, disenfranchised groups, often young men, loitering in inner cities, rather than what are often distinct gun cultures, discussed in full in Section 7.4

The aforementioned comments highlight how gun cultures can be embedded in certain professions and social groups, often involving membership of some description. These groups broadly, are either those associated with drugs and

crimes, or alternatively those communities involved in hunting, sports shooters, and those areas where gun ownership is deeply ingrained in local traditions, frequently with strong firearms ownership cultures. As evident in the USA, whose response to PMS according to P1 is “*we need more guns*”. Commenting on the influence of gun cultures on policymaking, P1 noted:

“where there is a strong firearms ownership culture ... they can only again be as strong as the public appetite”

The participants’ comments underscore the need for a nuanced, context-specific approach to understanding the impact of societal and cultural factors when addressing firearm violence and PMS. Exploring these themes through a critical realist (CR) lens helped to identify the underlying mechanisms and structures that shape these phenomena, while also acknowledging the role of human agency and the diversity of perspectives and experiences across different contexts.

Commenting on the balance between public safety and gun owners’ rights, participants discussed the influence of gun culture and interest groups on firearms legislation and public perceptions. Different societies may have varying perspectives on this balance based on their cultural attitudes towards firearms and individual rights. The way a society views this balance is a key aspect of its overall gun culture. Participants noted that in countries with strong gun cultures or powerful interest groups, there may be more resistance to restrictive legislation and a greater emphasis on protecting the rights of gun owners, discussed below.

6.4.1 Balance Between Public Safety and Firearms Owners’ Rights

The balance between public safety and gun owners’ rights is deeply influenced by gun cultures and societal attitudes towards firearms. The participant interviews provided a range of perspectives on the balance between gun owners’ rights and public safety concerns, illustrating the complexity of the issue and the variety of viewpoints that must be considered by policymakers. Nonetheless, the majority of participants were frequently more sympathetic towards and supporting of legal firearms owners as highlighted below, often due to their role or involvement in sport shooting of some description (discussed in Chapter 7).

Graham acknowledged the importance of public safety, yet emphasised the need to protect legitimate shooting sports:

“if public safety is not ensured, then our sports, our shooting sports are under huge threat, if people are able, if criminals are able to use guns for criminal purposes as a result of firearms legislation, you know being able to get guns either through theft or by actually being able to hold a certificate, there’s something very wrong”

Ivan also acknowledged the challenge of balancing public safety with the rights of gun owners. In his earlier comment (Section 5.5.2), Ivan noted that *“it took a clash with legitimate owners ... a gun owning lobby, you know sports shooters”* who argued that legitimate owners should not be ostracised because legal weapons were misused.

Graham and Simon also argued how tightening legislation only affects law abiding shooters, rather than criminals:

“99% of gun crime is caused by people who are ignoring the legislation, tightening the legislation will make no bloody difference at all” (Graham)

“So, you penalise an awful lot of people” (Simon)

Going further, Simon underscores how the safety measures in place in certain shooting sports illustrates that gun owners ensure responsible use of firearms, arguing that *“there are thousands of people ... who shoot at clays, in an astonishingly safe way”*. In support of this, Nick discussed public safety in policymaking, acknowledging the need to consider various stakeholders concerns:

“we ensure that the legal and policy framework is as robust as possible to support public opinion and protect public safety”

The aforementioned comments highlight the distinct perspectives of the participants, who perhaps unsurprisingly given their backgrounds, offer a view more aligned with the interest of firearms owners, reflecting how owners feel unfairly impacted by legislative changes.

Different societal attitudes and gun cultures shape the perceived balance between public safety and gun owners’ rights. Nils and Nic both reside in countries with

strong cultural connections to firearms, hunting and shooting. Their comments, nonetheless, echo the perspectives of the UK participants.

“the gun owners often feel targeted, so they’re not very happy, they’re always opposing it, in general although even within the gun, even within gun owners you have a lot of reasonable people ... they say well, legal firearms are not the problem, you have to target illegal firearms” (Nils)

“everybody is in favour of preventing mass shootings obviously, but they’re not necessarily in favour of even what you can call more practical measures, things like safe storage if the guns are at home” (Nic)

Both concurred that firearm owners feel targeted, indeed Nils observes that they *“often feel the victim”*, noting that whilst they might accept the need for strict rules, they were nonetheless resistant to changes that might impact them directly, and instead argued that this should be directed elsewhere, confirming how societies with strong gun cultures might prioritise gun owners’ rights.

Underscoring the interconnection between safety concerns and the rights of firearms owners, the participants recognise that public safety is crucial for the continued existence of shooting sports. However, as illustrated by the participants’ comments, discussions frequently focus on how gun owners feel, the victims and families are seldom considered. In support of this Mick notes how often suggestions that are supported by the families are often *“just batted away”*. Indeed, Mick’s comments and earlier quote (Section 5.5.2), illustrate the complex dynamics within the shooting community following a PMS, and the importance of acknowledging the gravity of such events rather than dismissing them as anomalies.

Bobby also comments on the balance between maintaining sports shooting whilst ensuring public safety, although notes that he offers a very nuanced perspective. Whilst sharing some characteristics with Mick, notably both are victims of mass shootings, and members of GCN, Bobby distinct to Mick, is a victim who also loves shooting (see Section 5.3):

“I don’t want to ban guns; I don’t want to see the sports suffer or the economy suffer ... I’m just about making families safe” (Bobby)

Bobby acknowledges the complex emotions and tension involved in balancing his personal experiences as a victim, with an interest in sports shooting.

The participants' comments highlight the challenges involved in crafting policies that address public safety concerns whilst also being respectful of those who engage in legitimate shooting activities and importantly taking into consideration the victims and families. Participants also noted how these attitudes influence public discourse and policy debates about firearms, and in doing so enriching discussions of how gun culture and societal attitudes impact firearms policy.

In addition to the balance between preserving sports shootings, ensuring public safety, and the rights of shooters with the concerns of victims and families, participants also briefly discuss the role of class, as it related to societal factors, noting varying class structures and perceptions.

6.4.2 Class Perceptions

Class perceptions and realities interact with firearm ownership and policy, fitting into the broader theme of societal and cultural factors, participants noted that class is a fundamental societal structure that influenced attitudes towards firearms ownership.

Discussing the perception of firearms as a class issue, Simon notes that there is a:

“perception among many politicians not just on the left but mainly on the right left, that guns are somehow associated with the wealthy”

Instead, Simon suggested that firearm ownership is more likely to be associated with rural areas and working-class communities, and in doing so challenges the perception that it is a wealthy-upper class activity. Simon also notes that there is a perception that legislation, or at least some of it *“is potentially class-based based on prejudice”*. Although by his own admission, Simon belongs to a group of *“nice middle-class people of a certain age”*.

P6 also discussed class, although in relation to the victim rather than those using firearms, emphasising how the class of victims *“is seen to matter”* suggesting *“it’s*

more severe if it's white middle-class kids that die". This supports those who suggest that the social class, race and age of the victim are the most important factors affecting the perceived severity of the events; cultural contexts shape perceptions of firearms ownership and use, and this influences both public opinion and policy approaches. The final section of this chapter will explore the impact of PMS on victims, survivors and families.

6.5 Surviving PMS: The Long-Term Effects

"Just don't make the same mistake as what they did with my family and just brush over hiccups in his application instead of looking into them" (Bobby)

The previous sections focused on the three broader but nonetheless important themes that have emerged from the data. The long-term effects of PMS on victims, survivors and families, the final theme that emerged from the participant interviews, will now be considered.

As illustrated by the participants' comments, policy responses and narratives following PMS often reflect the views of gun owners and those who participate in shooting as a hobby or pastime. The perspectives of victims and families are seldom considered and frequently the victims and survivors do not receive the same level of attention that is given to the perpetrator.

Nick suggests that often the initial focus is *"naturally"* on why the perpetrator did what they did, although it soon widens out:

"the families become the primary concern, the survivors of the shooting, the families, the impact on them ... certainly within government, it's how we see things"

Whilst Nick acknowledged that the families dominate the coverage after the initial focus on the shooter, Nils however, suggested that priority is given to the victims and families from the first day, noting that this:

"is usually the day where they focus on the people that got killed ... from the second day we start seeing more information about how this person got his gun, what the context was"

Reflecting on his and other victims' families' experiences, Mick offered a more nuanced perspective when he recalled their frustration with media coverage surrounding the events and how the perpetrators were portrayed:

"I've been close to victims and survivors and victims' families and survivors of mass shootings in other countries ... from our own experience in Dunblane, what we disliked was the use of his image, gratuitously"

However, Mick nonetheless was cognisant that there was a need to understand from the perpetrators' perspective, noting that without which:

"we're not going to stand much of a chance of trying to stop these things in the future"

These comments demonstrate how despite their grief, Mick and other victims' families' priorities continue to focus on trying to prevent a repeat of Dunblane and other PMS, and in doing so preventing other families from experiencing what they have been through.

Recalling the decision to return the weapons to the perpetrator who killed his mother, sister and aunt, Bobby reflected:

"Michael Atherton, he had a history of domestic violence ... police confiscated his guns, they give him them back which obviously was a big fatal mistake"

Bobby shared Mick's perspective, at least in the sense of wanting to protect other families from similar circumstances; as reflected in his comments in the epigraph, which reference the shooting of Christine Lee and her daughter Lucy, in Farnham in 2014:

"I kept saying it will happen again ... and it did happen again ... a man with a history of domestic violence is known to the police ... mental health issues, had a shotgun licence ... it was the exact same circumstances, well very close circumstances to what happened to my family"

The interviews provided an insight into the long-lasting emotional and psychological impact of PMS on victims, survivors and their families. Bobby reflects on how he was affected, and how he struggled to move forward. Noting

the impact of the shooting and his personal struggle Bobby reflected on coping with the trauma of losing his family members:

“I had to grow up, and become a man ... it’s quite a lot”

Bobby acknowledged the severity of the long-term emotional and psychological impact of the shooting, eight years later *“I was basically traumatised”*. Confirming that there is often very little consideration of the ongoing support required, Bobby reflected on seeking professional help:

“I went to trauma therapy ... I just felt like a completely different person, it was the most weirdest feeling ... in the space of 48 hours my life was completely different, or it felt completely different”

Affirming the importance of seeking professional help Bobby asserted that therapy was *“the best thing”* he had ever done. Mick similarly mentioned the ongoing support and understanding needed by victims’ families in the aftermath of a PMS, and particularly the importance of timing:

“as a victim’s father, I now look back and think well, we took a while to respond ourselves, so in many ways Dunblane wasn’t immediately led by the victim’s families, we got involved as soon as we could”

Whilst Bobby also noted how in his experience when it comes to political movement, there are periods of inaction and delays:

“it gets, it’s been dragged out ... the government don’t sit straight up and think, right we need to change this ... you’ve got to have meeting after meeting after meeting, unless something really, really terrible happens, like Dunblane”

Which can make it difficult for families to maintain momentum, as outlined by Mick:

“quite often victims’ families will get involved initially but this seems to burn out very quick, burn out, you know, they’ll say something initially and then you don’t hear from them again ... maybe there is an optimum time, after the event in which families have the impact and strength to do something”

Mick and Bobby’s personal experiences provided important victim perspectives on PMS, and the role of personal experiences and emotions in shaping individuals’ perspectives on firearm violence and driving legislative responses.

6.6 Summary

Organised around the themes of definitional complexities, the role of the media, social, cultural and political factors, and the long-term effects of PMS on victims and families, this chapter has presented the findings from the 11 participants. Their experiences and perspectives contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the underlying mechanisms and contexts that influence policy outcomes and the development of effective strategies to prevent and respond to PMS. The findings reveal valuable insights into the challenges of defining and categorising PMS, and the complex interplay of individual, social, and political factors in shaping responses to these events.

The findings from the two data chapters used the participants' quotations to support and present the themes that emerged from the data and collectively move this thesis closer to meeting the aim and objectives of the research. These themes provide a comprehensive overview of the various factors and considerations that shape the understanding of and responses to PMS, beyond the MSF. In the following chapter, the findings from the participant interviews will be synthesised with the existing literature to present an analysis and discussion of the findings from the data chapters.

Chapter 7 : Discussion

7.1 Introduction

“There are alternative pastimes which can provide the pleasure that they seek. There are no alternative lives for our children” (North, 2000)

The previous two chapters presented the findings from the participant interviews. This chapter synthesises these findings with the existing literature to explore the complex nature of public mass shootings (PMS). As outlined in Chapter 1, the research aims to examine how PMS are defined, framed and responded to across Europe through four key objectives: 1) To develop an in-depth understanding of PMS; 2) To examine key terminology and definitions; 3) To explore policymaking and legislative responses; and 4) To open a conversation on responses to PMS.

The discussion begins by making sense of responses to PMS through the lens of the multiple streams framework (MSF) and a critical realist (CR) perspective. It analyses how the problem, policy and politics streams interact to influence policy change following PMS. This section highlights the urgency often encapsulated in the ‘something must be done’ sentiment and its potential consequences, particularly how it can lead to oversimplified problem definitions and hasty legislative responses. Following this, the chapter will explore the complexities of defining and categorising PMS, challenging traditional definitions by proposing a more inclusive approach that considers the perpetrator’s intent rather than just the outcome. It will introduce a comprehensive typology of victims that captures the full extent of harm experienced by individuals, families and communities.

The discussion will delve into the social and cultural factors shaping perceptions and responses to PMS, examining concepts of cultural congeniality and common narratives surrounding firearms. It will address the tension between firearms owners’ interests and victims’ rights, however, emphasises the need to prioritise victims in discussions about PMS. Throughout, the chapter will analyse intra-stream conflicts (such as disagreements within political parties or among policy experts), which are complicated by tensions between the streams; for example, urgency in the problem stream often clashes with the need for well-researched

solutions in the policy stream, while culturally congenial beliefs in the politics stream can conflict with evidence-based problem definitions. This synthesis of insights will enhance understanding of PMS responses across different national contexts.

7.2 Making Sense of Public Mass Shootings: Streams, Windows and Signals

The MSF offers a valuable lens for analysing policy responses to PMS. Concepts such as streams, national mood, windows and focusing events are challenging to quantify and therefore invite storytelling (Herweg, Zahariadis and Zohlnhöfer, 2023); yet they illustrate the dynamic nature of firearms policy development. This section explores how public sentiment, characterised as ‘something must be done’, interacts with political action and policy entrepreneurs to shape legislative responses.

Understanding PMS requires both information collection and framing within different contexts, significantly influencing public perceptions and policy responses. According to Herweg, Zahariadis and Zohlnhöfer (2023), Kingdon’s MSF negates the existence of a single rational solution, assuming that multiple solutions exist due to ambiguity. While more information can reduce uncertainty regarding how PMS are perpetrated, the frequency and demographics, it cannot determine if they should be categorised as policy failures, gun control issues or mental health concerns.

This ambiguity aligns with Kingdon’s (1984) concept of problem definition within the MSF’s problem stream. PMS act as focusing events, bringing firearms violence to public and political attention, exemplifying how problems gain prominence. However, varied interpretations highlight the complexity of problem definition. In the MSF, problems are viewed as social constructs rather than objective facts. Knaggård (2015) emphasises the importance of agency in the problem stream, suggesting that effectively framing a problem ensures policymakers’ attention. This framing process is crucial, as it determines which solutions can be coupled with the defined problems.

To create opportunities for policy entrepreneurs to advance potential solutions, process managers (see Figure 7:1) align the streams. In the context of PMS, process managers might include senior policymakers, or key intermediaries who reconcile differing perspectives, ensuring urgent public sentiment is translated into meaningful policy responses. Process managers play a crucial role facilitating communication between stakeholders and helping to manage conflicts within and between the streams. Following the Dunblane and Hungerford PMS process managers were critical in shaping policy responses, coordinating efforts among stakeholders to implement stricter firearms control measures and facilitating dialogue between policymakers and interest groups seeking reform. Similarly, following the Winnenden PMS process managers navigated misdirected blame to refocus discussions on effective legislative solutions to firearms violence.

Figure 7:1 MSF A Perspective of PMS: Actors, Issues and Interactions
(Authors own image)

7.2.1 Something Must be Done

The impact of framing on policy responses is evident in the literature and case studies. Smith (2006) discussed how UK governments felt compelled to be seen 'to be doing something' when faced with a crisis, aligning with the MSF's concept of policy windows. This 'something must be done' phenomenon was evident

across the case studies and addresses the research question, how do focusing events/PMS influence policy development in different national contexts?

Participants from various countries noted a universal ‘something must be done’ response to PMS. Simon expressed this sentiment succinctly:

“oh my God, that’s awful, we’ve got to do something ... the politicians want to do something”

Similarly, Nils from Belgium remarked:

“the shootings kind of give politicians an opportunity to do something”

These accounts demonstrate how PMS can open policy windows, but they also reveal a potential shortcoming in policy responses, the prioritisation of swift, visible action, over comprehensive long-term solutions.

This urgency to act can create conflict within and between the MSF streams. Innes and Fielding (2002) suggest certain crimes act as signals, important not only for the harm done to victims, but also for what they signify to the wider community. Prompting social reactions motivated by the need for a greater sense of security. Building on this, Innes (2015) introduced the phrase legislative reflex to describe policymakers’ attempts to be seen to be taking action, as discussed in Section 4.1.1. This concept is particularly relevant in the context of PMS; the findings have demonstrated public sentiment can and has created pressure for policy change.

Mick recalled how this urgency compelled policymakers to respond:

“this is going on; we need to do something about it now”

This aligns with Kingdon’s concept of policy windows, illustrating how public sentiment can create opportunities for legislative change.

Following Dunblane, both problem brokers and policy entrepreneurs were active. Problem brokers focus on framing issues and advocating for action, without proposing specific solutions (Knaggård, 2015), while policy entrepreneurs suggest concrete measures (Herweg, Zahariadis and Zohlnhöfer, 2023). This distinction

highlights the gap between recognising issues and implementing effective responses. Mick recalled how during their campaign, the GCN seized the opportunity to advocate for a complete handgun ban. The media and the Snowdrop Campaign acted as problem brokers by fanning the issue as urgent, while the GCN proposed specific solutions. Consequently, various actors, including family members, politicians, interest groups, and policing organisations, served as problem brokers and policy entrepreneurs in shaping policy responses to PMS.

PMS act as focusing events that couple the problem, policy, and politics streams, a process Boscarino (2009) terms 'problem surfing', and Zahariadis (2003, p.72) calls 'consequential coupling'. These concepts are particularly relevant when examining how policy windows open in relation to PMS within Kingdon's (1984) 'policy primeval soup'. The research explored 18 PMS across four countries, only 7 were 'catalytic cases' leading to policy change (discussed in Chapter 4). These catalytic cases exemplify Kingdon's concept of policy windows, demonstrating how interactions between the streams drives policy change. However, significant policy change only occurs when all three streams align. The selective impact of PMS on policy development underscores the complexity of policymaking and the need for multiple factors to converge for change.

Even with support, opportunities for change are limited. Kingdon (1984) explains that the fleeting nature of policy windows often leads to preexisting solutions being adopted. Indeed Herweg, Zahariadis and Zohlnhöfer (2023) note that the limited time to find solutions often leads to problems being coupled with preexisting solutions that are 'somehow' linked to the problem. For example, the McKay Report became a Green Paper that set the governments' firearm agenda for two decades; parts of the original report had been saved in the policy stream for introduction later when political circumstances were right (Olson and Kopel, 1999). In this case, the Hungerford shooting effectively coupled policy alternatives with the problem and politics stream; stricter firearm control measures emerged from public outrage and government willingness to act. Key actors seized this opportunity for reform, leading to the introduction of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988. This demonstrates how policy alternatives can be successfully aligned

with recognised problems when a policy window opens, and emerging opportunities for reform are seized (Arslangulov and Ackrill, 2022).

7.2.2 The Consequences of Hasty Responses

The Firearms (Amendment) Act also illustrates the limitations of hasty policymaking. It failed to ban the .22 calibre rim-fire weapon used in the Hungerford PMS, instead prohibiting pump-action weapons with capacities over two rounds, despite their lack of involvement in the incident (Squires, 2000). Self-loading rifles were also banned, even though Hungerford was the only case of such a rifle being used in British homicide (Olson and Kopel, 1999, p. 430). This approach was deemed politically safe, as it was expected to offend only a ‘small and not important’ number of voters compared to shotgun owners, who represent the largest group of gun owners (Olson and Kopel, 1999) even today. Recent Home Office statistics (2024) indicate that, as of March 2024, there were 147,364 firearms certificates and 495,798 shotguns registered in the UK, with 6,809 new firearm applications and 16,529 for shotguns.

This political reasoning may help explain the continued resistance to extending the same restrictions to shotguns as to firearms. Proponents argue that shotguns are already subject to stringent regulation and that additional measures could adversely affect legitimate use (Eve, 2023; Home Office, 2023a). Such dynamics highlight the challenges of enacting effective legislation that genuinely addresses public safety concerns. The findings indicate that policymakers often prioritise appeasing firearms owners over implementing comprehensive reforms.

Concerns about rushed policy responses also raise questions regarding their long-term effectiveness. Nic questioned:

“to what extent are the changes to legislation cosmetic or are they actually making it more difficult for potential shooters to get hold of guns?”

This reflects the tension between the need for swift action and the development of evidence-based policies. Ivan echoed Nic’s sentiment:

“are we really addressing the problem that led to that mass shooting, or are we just addressing something else, are we just kind of showing that we are doing something?”

These perspectives illustrate conflict within the policy stream: pressure for quick visible changes versus the need for well-researched solutions that address the root causes. This often results in a tension between short-term political expediency and long-term policy effectiveness. Ivan’s comment highlights the ‘something must be done’ phenomenon, emphasising urgency over meaningful change. This urgency can manifest differently across countries, influencing how policymakers respond to PMS and shape firearms legislation.

The three key elements of the politics stream, national mood, government influence, and interest group dynamics differ significantly, explaining why similar policy issues might be approached differently. As noted by Herweg, Zahariadis and Zohlnhöfer (2023) not all elements of the politics stream need to align. This was evident following Dunblane, public opinion diverged from initial policy direction, while the gun lobby pushed in one direction, public sentiment leaned in another. This divergence demonstrates that elements of the politics stream are not always aligned but can still lead to policy change.

This section has examined how public sentiment, often characterised by the ‘something must be done’ phenomenon, interacts with political action and policy entrepreneurs to shape legislative responses. It demonstrates that variations in responses are influenced by political culture, stakeholder/interest group engagement, and broader public attitudes. These findings highlight the complexities involved in framing issues and developing effective, long-term policy solutions in the aftermath of such tragedies. The following section discusses the challenges of defining PMS.

7.3 Defining and Categorising PMS - Defining by Numbers

As discussed previously, the definition of PMS in academic and legal contexts lacks consensus and standardisation (Huff-Corzine and Corzine, 2020; Bridges, Tober and Brazzell, 2023). This definitional flexibility (Travers, McDonagh and Elklit, 2018), leads to differing interpretations of what constitutes a PMS,

presenting significant challenges for research and policymaking. A standardised definition is crucial for advancing research and prevention efforts (Daraklis *et al.*, 2024). This section explores these challenges, drawing on the participants' interviews from Chapters 5 and 6, and current literature to propose a more comprehensive approach.

Definitions of cases vary across research groups and studies, complicating the collection of accurate information and potentially producing misleading findings (Anisin, 2022b). To minimise false positives and negatives (see Section 2.2.1) and to avoid disparities in data collection, analysis, and the prioritisation of policy responses, definitions must be coherent and consistent applied.

Participant 6 (P6), highlighted these definitional challenges:

"there are several [definitions] that have been used in research ... the most used one is that there are several victims, some have the limit of four and some have the limit at a lower limit of victims, do they have to be people were hurt, or does that mean that people died?"

This illustrates how different criteria, such as the number of victims and distinction between injuries and fatalities, can affect how PMS are understood and responded to.

Fox and Fridel (2022, p. 23) propose an 'unambiguous, easy to apply definition' with a threshold of four or more fatalities, arguing that death and injury are qualitatively distinct. They advocate for maintaining this threshold for reliable historical data collection. However, advancements in medical care (see Section 2.1.4) may alter outcomes; an event that once resulted in four fatalities might now result in three. Thus, a broader understanding of PMS is necessary to capture their full societal impact (discussed in full below).

This debate highlights tensions within the MSF's problem stream, as stakeholders, including researchers, policymakers and interest groups, often frame PMS in different ways. Such definitional inconsistencies can create disparities in understanding, measurement and policy responses. The tension between

maintaining strict definitional criteria and a more inclusive approach reflects broader societal conflicts regarding firearms violence.

Fox and Fridel (2022, p. 23) acknowledge that their definition, like many others, is 'somewhat arbitrary and thus, imperfect', noting that timing, opportunity or the perpetrator's skill can influence whether an incident qualifies as a PMS. This was noted by Ivan during his interview:

"it doesn't take much skill to use an AK and to pretty quickly create a lot of damage"

Nonetheless, Fox and Fridel (2022) criticise attempts to redefine PMS to include injuries, arguing this alters the nature of the crime from mass murder to mass attempted murder. Contrary to their view, Anisin (2022b) argues for adopting a lower fatality threshold (than four or more) to ensure that all PMS are captured. He considers the distinction between two, three or four fatalities conceptually arbitrary. Participants echoed this perspective. Simon questioned the commonly used four fatality thresholds:

"I think the number is, any one is a tragedy"

Mick also advocated for a more inclusive approach:

"I don't think I would put up a strict definition ... however many victims there are and whatever happens to the victims ... even if it's one death or 16"

Bobby challenged conventional definitions that rely on a minimum number of fatalities, emphasising that even a single death profoundly impacts those affected (see Section 7.3.2). Whilst Mick noted how fatality thresholds frustrated families:

"many victims in the States, their shootings are ignored because they happen to be individual, or one or two rather than on a scale as we had at Dunblane and elsewhere"

Similarly, Martin remarked on how PMS have become so common in America that only those where *"20 plus people are killed"* receive attention.

These perspectives highlight the need for definitions of PMS to consider all victims, rather than solely focusing on fatalities. Whilst fatality counts remain

important metrics, they should not be the sole determinant of severity. The way PMS are defined has far-reaching implications for how they are measured, interpreted, and addressed. Reliance on arbitrary fatality thresholds can distort public and policy perceptions of these tragedies and influence the level of support offered to those affected. Events that do not meet the four-fatality threshold should not be disregarded; this research contends that the perpetrator's intent should be considered a key factor alongside outcomes.

7.3.1 Intent Over Outcome

Multiple factors can influence fatality rates, including the number and location of wounds, and emergency response times, none of which necessarily reflect the perpetrator's intent. Focusing solely on fatalities therefore fails to capture the full extent of these incidents; often the difference between life and death is simply a matter of luck (Fox and Fridel, 2022, p. 19). Perpetrators frequently fail to fatally shoot all of their victims. Among the 18 PMS analysed in this research, only Erfurt, Espoo and Imatra resulted in fatalities with no injuries, underscoring the limitations of relying solely on fatality counts.

Perpetrators intend to commit violence using lethal weapons; they do not exercise caution when bringing firearms into public spaces and repeatedly discharging them. They often consciously target vulnerable populations, particularly in locations such as schools, as seen in Dunblane, Erfurt, Winnenden, Jokela and Kauhajoki. As Anisin (2022b) observes, their common intention is to kill as many people as possible in the shortest possible time. Bobby echoed this view, noting that such incidents typically involve perpetrators:

“opening fire and killing as many people as they possibly can”

Focusing solely on fatality counts overlooks the intent to cause widespread harm. Kelleher's (1997) concept of 'mass murder by intention' highlights the importance of the perpetrator's mindset over final fatality counts. By considering intent alongside outcomes, it is possible to develop a more comprehensive understanding of PMS that reflects their full impact, including those incidents that result in fewer fatalities than arbitrary fatality thresholds might dictate.

While a PMS resulting in many deaths is unequivocally not 'equivalent' to one with fewer fatalities, the intent to cause harm is crucial in both cases. Understanding why some PMS lead to higher fatality counts is important (for a full discussion see Anisin 2022b). However, this research argues that incidents resulting in one or two fatalities are equally relevant; although these perpetrators may not be 'successful' compared to those with higher fatality counts, they nonetheless are likely to have acted for the same reasons (Anisin, 2022b, p. 87). Their intent is clearly to kill as many people as possible. Including both injuries and fatalities provides a more accurate picture of the severity of these events.

Conflating fatalities with injuries, rather than trivialising the severity and permanence of death, as argued by Fox and Fridel (2022), acknowledges the value of all victims. Therefore, this research advocates for adopting a definition with a lower fatality count than the standard threshold of four or more fatalities. The proposed definition of PMS is: 'Shootings occurring in public or semi-public spaces, perpetrated by one perpetrator, resulting in three or more victims randomly selected, with at least one fatality' (see Section 8.3 for the rationale for including one fatality). This excludes institutionalised killings such as war crimes, acts of terrorism, hate crime, organised or conventional crime.

Applying this definition to the research period from 1987 to 2016 identified 397 direct victims across 18 PMS; however, the number of indirect victims (see Section 7.5), will far exceed this figure. A more inclusive definition captures PMS that might otherwise be overlooked by restrictive criteria while maintaining a clear classification threshold. Such an approach challenges conventional fatality-centric definitions and helps to mitigate the risk of underestimating the true impact of PMS.

Recognising that the line between life and death is often a matter of circumstance rather than intent allows for meaningful comparisons across different time periods. Improved medical capabilities mean that past incidents may have higher survival rates today. Proposing a more inclusive definition addresses the research objective of developing a comprehensive understanding of these events. Furthermore, this expanded definition acknowledges that PMS impacts extend

beyond immediate families to include long-term physical and psychological trauma for survivors and communities.

7.3.2 Victims, Families and Communities

“This man could have been stopped, this man should have been stopped, I need never have had to know who he was” (North, 2000, p. 19)

As discussed previously, PMS are often categorised using arbitrary fatality thresholds that fail to capture the full extent of harm. The impact extends beyond those fatally shot to include those injured, as well as the wider communities in which the incidents occur. Participants emphasised the importance of recognising and respecting all victims when developing policies addressing PMS and public safety. This section examines the harm, pain and loss experienced by victims, their families and the broader community.

Several authors suggest that the impact of PMS on individuals can be understood through distinct groups (Kerdelmelidis and Reid, 2019) including rescue workers (May and North, 2016), media professionals and journalists (Backholm, 2016), families (Dyregrov, Dyregrov and Kristensen, 2015), and communities (Lowe and Galea, 2017). Whilst these studies primarily focus on the adverse mental health outcomes, the present research examines the broader societal consequences for victims, families and communities. Building on this approach, it adopts the view that impacts should be considered in group terms and proposes six distinct victim categories to capture the full extent of harm following PMS (see Figure 7:2).

Direct victims are those killed or physically injured during the PMS. Proximal victims are present at the scene but are not physically harmed, although they experience trauma; Vicarious victims include family members, close friends or others with personal connections to direct and proximal victims. Response victims comprise emergency service personnel and medical staff involved in the immediate aftermath. Co-victims are members of the local community, including residents, businesses, and schools. Finally, secondary victims are those exposed to media coverage or accounts of the incident.

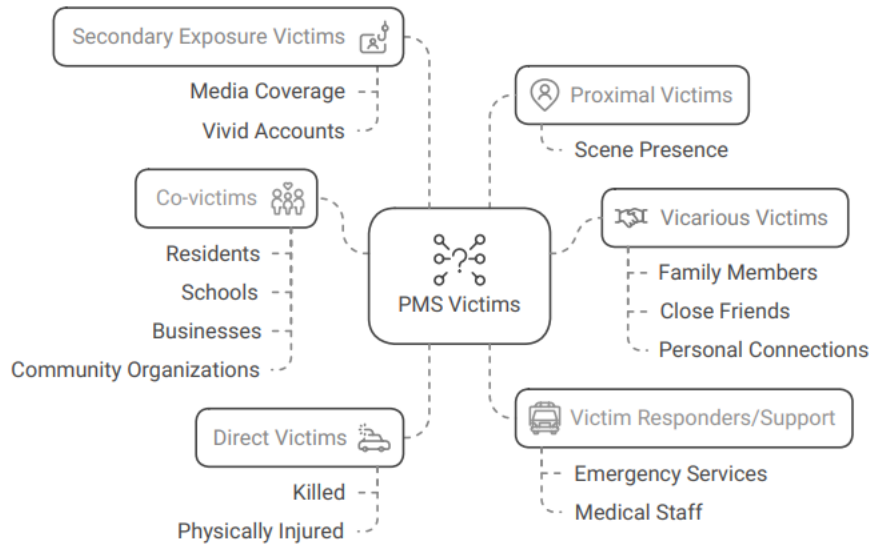


Figure 7:2 Typology of Victims Affected by Public Mass Shootings
(Authors own image)

There could arguably be a seventh group, collateral victims, referring to family members of perpetrators who suffer the consequences of their loved one's actions (Newman, 2004; 2017). This highlights the complex and far-reaching impact of PMS. However, this research prioritises the rights and experiences of direct victims, their families and their communities, over those of firearms owners or perpetrators' families.

7.3.3 Direct and Proximal Victims

PMS are often malicious and unpredictable, creating a sense of helplessness that can make them more traumatic than other types of death (Wilson, 2016; Kerdemelidis and Reid, 2019, p. 17; Rowhani-Rahbar *et al.*, 2019). Exposure to PMS, and particularly greater proximity, is associated with an increased risk of mental health issues; survivors face higher risks of fear, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression (Novotney, 2018; Cowan *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, Goldman and Galea (2014) and Littleton, Kumpula and Orcutt (2011) suggest between 40 and 95% of direct victims of PMS develop PTSD, which can appear immediately or years later (Eifert, 2022). Trauma resulting from PMS can also affect educational attainment and earning capacity. Although most individuals exposed to such events appear to make a full recovery, some experience longer term dysfunction and psychological responses (Travers, McDonagh and Elklit, 2018). Medication prescribed to treat survivors' physical injuries may inadvertently

mask emotional pain and trauma, occasionally leading to dependency or addiction, and compounding long-term harm (Beckett and Larney, 2017).

7.3.4 Vicarious Victims

Families of victims often experience significant mental health challenges (Abdalla *et al.*, 2022), with parents showing increased medical consultations and diagnoses and siblings experiencing educational disruptions following PMS (Bharadwaj, Bhuller and Løken, 2021). Mick recalled how families often seemed:

“to burn out very quick”

Bobby also reflected on his own experiences of grief:

“I kind of hit the self-destruct button, cos I was that busy and that involved in things I never had time to think and realise what had happened, like 2018 back end of 2017 I think things hit us, hit home”

Recalling how he had unconsciously protected himself, and in doing so without realising it, he had been unable to move forward:

“life was kind of stuck in 2012, whenever I related back, if someone asked us a question, I’d be answering it as if I was in 2012 ... if someone asked me how old I was I’d say I was 23, but I wasn’t, I was 27, cos I was 23 when things happened. I was like stuck in 2012; my life hadn’t moved on from that year”

Mick and Bobby are both victims who have lost loved ones, yet their experiences of grief are distinct. Additionally, Bobby was interviewed eight years after the event in 2012, whilst Mick was interviewed nearly 23 years after the Dunblane tragedy in 1996. It is therefore possible that the intensity of Mick’s grief has diminished over time, whereas Bobby, being closer in time to his loss, likely experienced heightened grief and symptoms. Supporting this notion, Kerdelmidis and Reid (2019) suggest that individuals respond differently based on their temporal proximity to both the event and the victim. Consequently, as time passes, the intensity of symptoms and grief tend to decrease.

Bobby reflected on the diverse experiences of grief within families:

“even victims’ families think differently, we all don’t think the same, we all don’t feel the same”

Bobby and Mick’s accounts highlight the diversity of experiences within victims’ families, illustrating how individuals with similar relationships to victims may cope differently with PMS-related trauma.

Debbie Mayor’s mother Gwen was the teacher who died protecting children during the Dunblane massacre (Meyer, 2021). Debbie’s experience illustrated the intergenerational impact of such tragedies, extending fear and trauma to subsequent generations.

These narratives reveal the complexity of trauma, the challenges faced, and the resilience demonstrated by PMS victims and their families. Their experiences offer valuable insights, emphasising the importance of a more inclusive understanding of PMS, one that recognises all those affected and responds appropriately.

7.3.5 Response Victims

PMS also have significant mental health consequences for response victims (Norris *et al.*, 2002), an under researched area (Rothrock, 2024). First responders though not direct witnesses are exposed to severely injured and fatally wounded individuals (May and North, 2016), leading to psychological distress.

7.3.6 Community/Co-victims

The psychological and emotional toll of PMS extends to entire communities, instilling fear and causing lasting and significant social disruption (Ministry of Justice, 2009; Abdalla *et al.*, 2022). Rowhani-Rahbar, Zatzick and Rivara (2019) note that PMS impact organisations, schools and businesses, illustrating what Saul (2014) and Somasundaram (2014) describe as collective trauma. Building on this concept, Cowan *et al.* (2019) characterise the community itself as a ‘co-victim’ of PMS, reflecting how these events affect entire communities.

Participant 6 remarked on how the Jokela shooting affected *“local communities and social relations in the communities”*. Such incidents can cause social disruption and a loss of community cohesion, complicating the healing process (Crandall, Parnell and Spillan, 2013). Collective trauma can lead to varied responses among community members, including grief, loss, anger, denial or blame, representing the negative consequences of PMS at the collective level (Somasundaram, 2014).

Mick’s experience in Dunblane demonstrates how collective trauma can manifest in unexpected ways. He recalled facing ‘callous and heartless attacks in the press and on TV’ (North, 1996b) and observed that some within the community appeared to believe that their grief was greater and more significant than that of those directly affected (North, 2000, p. 104). He further reflected that ‘those less affected must be sheltered from the full horror of the events and don’t care to cope with the grief felt by those of us who have suffered the most’ noting that certain community members ‘wish to see the consequences of the 13th March under the carpet’ (North, 2000, p. 246-247).

These reactions may reflect what Abrams (2023) referred to as ‘a cascade of collective traumas’, as communities face multiple stressors in quick succession; in this instance, the shooting, grief, media scrutiny, increased public presence, and investigations. Alternatively, it could indicate frustrations among residents who felt that their home would now be defined by the tragedy. As noted in the epigraph in Section 4.2.4, Dunblane will always be associated with the horrific events of that day (Allan, 2016), while for the residents, it remains their home.

7.3.7 Secondary Victims

Secondary victims of PMS, often overlooked in research, can experience significant trauma despite not being present at the scene (Lowe and Galea, 2017). Participant insights reinforced this point, with Martin noting Dunblane’s *“considerable effect on a number of people”* and Mick recalling how hundreds of people in Dunblane experienced trauma: ‘parents waiting anxiously to be reunited with their children, relatives and friends hanging on for news’ (North, 2000, p. 104).

The impact of PMS extends beyond the immediate families of victims; Debbie highlighted the worldwide sympathy that followed Dunblane (Meyer, 2021). As Koerth (2022) observes, trauma can also occur at a distance, with many individuals experiencing the aftermath indirectly through media exposure (Abrams, 2023). The fear of becoming a victim of PMS may deter individuals from attending public places or events, a pattern observed particularly in parts of America (Cowan *et al.*, 2020).

PMS represent a significant public health concern, with societal costs that extend beyond financial burdens to encompass profound effects on the mental health and well-being of victims and affected communities (Rhee *et al.*, 2016). While some recover, others face long-lasting adverse effects, with both physical and emotional scars (Hunter, 2018). Survivors are also continually reminded of the inaction of gun control, following every PMS, particularly in the US context (Beckett and Lartey, 2017).

The perspectives of directly affected individuals like Mick and Bobby provide a comprehensive and emotionally resonant understanding of the long-term impact of PMS, emphasising the need for sustained support and greater recognition of victims' diverse experiences. Adopting an inclusive definition that accounts for both fatalities and injuries has significant implications for research and policy. It enables a more comprehensive understanding of societal impacts and may inform legislation that addresses not only physical harm but also psychological and social consequences. The following section examines the interrelated social and cultural factors that shape perspectives on firearms and influence the likelihood of policy change following PMS.

7.4 Social and Cultural Factors - Cultural Congeniality

*"How could a weekend hobby be worth the life of an innocent child?"
(Hunter, 2018)*

Understanding PMS requires acknowledging not only their occurrence but also the underlying factors that shape their interpretation and the formulation of potential policy solutions. As Tonry (2009, p. 378) observes, the reasons behind policy changes are deeply embedded in local histories and cultures. A CR approach was

therefore adopted to examine how social and cultural contexts influence responses to PMS and firearms policy. These incidents are shaped by broader social, cultural, and political structures that inform both public perceptions and policy decisions. The way they are framed, whether as terrorist attacks, mental health crises, or failures of firearms control, significantly influences public understanding and policy responses. Such framing is itself shaped by individuals' backgrounds, values, beliefs and experiences (Brugnach and Ingram, 2012).

7.4.1 Cultural Congeniality/Normalisation of Firearms

Attitudes towards firearms depend on the social meaning attributed to them (Kahan and Braman, 2003). Culturally congenial beliefs align with an individual's existing values and can shape perceptions of firearms and PMS (Kahan *et al.*, 2017, p. 77). Participants discussed how social norms influence perceptions of firearms. Narratives that resonate with an individual's cultural commitments shape understanding and responses (Braman and Kahan, 2003, p. 8). Graham, for example, as a representative of a sports shooting organisation holds a nuanced view of firearms and his 'gun culture', compared to Ivan, Nils or P6, who believe firearms promote violence.

Simon and Graham's military backgrounds and shared experiences in shooting activities with their sons illustrate how intergenerational practices reinforce cultural attitudes towards firearms. Their experiences normalise firearm use within their families. Bobby, lacking a military background but raised around shooting culture, exemplifies how diverse experiences can foster similar attachments.

Mick and Bobby however provide a powerful juxtaposition; both victims of mass shootings who have campaigned for the GCN, yet with contrasting views on firearms. Bobby supports recreational shooting despite being a victim, while Mick sees firearms solely as machines designed to kill (North, 2000), reflecting Kahan's concept of cultural congeniality. Mick's experience has led him to reject firearms entirely, demonstrating how personal experiences can reinforce cultural cognitions on both sides of the debate (Kahan *et al.*, 2017).

These diverse perspectives illustrate conflicts within the politics stream of the MSF, which encompasses national mood, organised political forces, and government changes. Cultural congeniality creates tension among interest groups, shaping national sentiment and influencing political responses to PMS. These conflicts within the politics stream can significantly impact policy outcomes, as policymakers must navigate competing cultural narratives and interest group pressures when formulating responses to PMS. The contrasting views of Mick and Bobby, exemplify how personal experiences can lead to divergent stances on firearms legislation.

Kahan *et al.*'s (2017) concept of cultural congeniality explains polarised views on firearm use, individuals with different worldviews can interpret the same evidence about firearm violence yet arrive at very different conclusions regarding its significance and appropriate responses. Social norms shape these worldviews and act as cognitive filters (Kahan and Braman, 2003, p. 1324) leading to selective acceptance of evidence that aligns with existing beliefs while dismissing conflicting information.

This selective acceptance is evident in debates surrounding firearms legislation. During the Cullen Inquiry, for instance, Greenwood (2000) criticised evidence presented by advocates of stricter legislation for lacking a scientific basis, despite its reliance on statistical data (the 1972 Green Paper). Similarly, Smith (2006) observed that the Labour Party's interpretation of theft statistics was misleading, illustrating how certain actors promote their own version of social reality. This tendency reinforces Kahan's (2012) assertion that individuals are likely to accept information that reinforces their pre-existing cultural values while rejecting evidence that challenges them.

7.4.1 The Only Thing That Stops a Bad Guy With a Gun, is a Good Guy With a Gun

Participants discussed how America's cultural attachment to firearms acts as a cognitive filter. Nic noted that following a PMS:

"there are often calls for improved legislation ... that's one difference between the US and everywhere else ... the US you don't"

Mick echoed this sentiment, suggesting that:

“most commentators want to choose anything other than gun ownership as the cause”

This selective acceptance of expert opinion aligns with cultural predispositions (Kahan *et al.*, 2017, p. 749), particularly evident in the US context. Martin highlighted the ubiquitous nature of firearms stating *“yes, there are lots of people killed but compared with the positives”* referring to crime prevention and self-defence benefits associated with firearms ownership. The National Rifle Association (NRA) rhetoric emphasises these positives over the impact of firearm-related deaths (Kahan and Braman, 2016). Zhang *et al.* (2019) found that despite widespread sympathy and public mourning following PMS, such events were used to justify firearm rights, embodied in the phrase, ‘the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun’ (Lapierre, 2012).

As an American living abroad, P1 remarked on the US reaction to PMS:

“we need more guns ... it’s unfortunate that it’s happened, but everybody deserves to have a gun”

This perspective illustrates how cultural context shapes attitudes towards firearms. P1 noted that growing up in a household where guns are important influences ones’ views:

“if guns are important then that’s where you’re gonna go ... if not you’re on the other side of the argument that says guns promote violence”

P1 also recognised the complexity of American gun culture, but also how he positions himself:

“everyone has the right to have a gun ... but I want nothing to do with them”

This dichotomy suggests that exposure to different cultural contexts can modify culturally congenial beliefs, challenging the notion that cultural cognition is rigid and unchangeable (Kahan *et al.*, 2017). P1 offers a unique perspective on the malleability of cultural cognition, acknowledging the American belief in the right to

firearm ownership, while simultaneously expressing a personal aversion to firearms, revealing the complexity of his perspective.

Certain groups resist change due to entrenched views of firearms, affecting legislative responses (Hurka, 2017). Stroebe *et al.* (2022) found that individuals who believe widespread firearm ownership reduces crime are unlikely to blame firearms for PMS. Nils noted how interest groups in Belgium stalled restrictive legislation until after the Antwerp shooting. Similarly, Mick observed that blame for the Winnenden shooting was directed at video games rather than firearms. Whilst in Finland, P6 mentioned discussions focused on social issues such as bullying and mental health, effectively distancing the debate from firearm ownership. These examples illustrate how cultural cognition influences interpretations of PMS and policy responses (Kahan *et al.*, 2017).

The contrasting response to PMS in the US and Europe reflect deeper cultural differences regarding individual rights versus collective security. The American Constitution complicates policy responses, whilst European countries have been more amenable to strengthening legislation. These examples emphasise how culturally congenial beliefs shaped interpretations of events, attributing blame to factors other than firearms.

While the UK may lack the same cultural attachment to firearms as Germany, Finland, Belgium or America, strong interest groups still exert considerable influence over politicians and policy. Indeed, North (2000, p.146) noted how ‘gun owners manoeuvred arguments’, distancing themselves from perpetrators by claiming incidents involved illegally obtained weapons or licensing failures. This demonstrates how individuals process information and maintain congruence with their beliefs (Joslyn and Haider-Markel, p. 431).

7.4.2 Colouring Between the Lines

“No longer would the perceived importance of their pastime be sufficient reason to avoid changes” (North, 2000, p. 161)

Social and cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping perceptions and responses to firearms across different contexts. Countries with strong cultural

attachments to firearms often prioritise owners' rights over victims and community safety, as evidenced by the case studies and interviews.

In Section 6.4.1, the participants emphasised the need for balance, noting that narratives around firearms legislation frequently focus on enabling firearm users to continue to enjoy their sport, rather than regulating access. This reflects concerns that the rights of firearm owners are prioritised over public safety (Eve, 2023; GCN, 2023). Indeed, Graham, emphatically asserted that their *“overriding objective is to ensure public safety”*, nonetheless criticised representative organisations for having done *“a rotten job ... to limit the damage to our sports”*, illustrating the tension between public safety and firearms owners' interests.

Graham's view aligns with that of the Home Office (2023b), as both emphasise the need for proportionality. However, the Home Office's claim that the 'vast majority of licensed firearms holders are law abiding and cause no concern' overlooks the fact that the perpetrators of the Hungerford, Dunblane, Cumbria, Durham, Surrey and Keyham shootings were all licensed firearms holders. This discrepancy raises questions about the adequacy of existing legislative responses and highlights the difficulty of reconciling public safety with the interests of lawful firearms owners. Measures designed to mitigate public safety risks must therefore remain proportionate and reflective of the complex realities involved.

Some argue that limiting access to firearm threatens shooters' perceived rights (Mortimer, 2020). Simon suggested legislative measures:

“penalise people pursuing something that was legal and suddenly became illegal”

While Nils observed that firearms owners *“often feel the victim”*, reflecting a perception of being treated unfairly. Similarly, Greenwood (2010) contends that law-abiding citizens have been subjected to collective punishment, undermining their individual liberty in the name of 'collective safety'.

Ivan also noted how firearms owners view themselves as responsible citizens who do not wish to be ostracised:

“because of what people do with illegal weapons”

Indeed, changes to firearms legislation are frequently criticised for failing to deter criminals while disproportionately penalising law-abiding owners. Terwingen (2011) referred to this as ‘colouring between the lines’. Graham cynically suggested that legislation “*would not prevent individuals from getting hold of firearms*”, a view echoed by Elder (2022), who argued that those intent on using firearms illegally are unlikely to be deterred by stricter regulations. Similarly, Simon also agreed that “*legislation by definition is not going to deter the criminal*”.

The Liège shooting illustrates these limitations; the perpetrator was able to acquire firearms despite being legally prohibited from doing so. This reinforces the view that individuals with criminal intent frequently disregard the law entirely, while responsible firearms owners often feel unfairly affected by policies aimed at addressing firearms violence.

Graham, Simon and Bobby acknowledge the need to consider law-abiding owners’ interests while stressing the importance of effective regulation. However, Simon noted the challenge of preventing incidents when a legal owner becomes unsuitable:

“actually, they can’t, you can’t prevent them, because either a legally or illegally held gun, and somebody who’s snapped can [become] ... evil or something, you can’t stop it”

This highlights the unpredictable nature of human behaviour and the limitations of legislation in preventing PMS.

While these perspectives are important for understanding the concerns of the shooting community, they may be overly simplistic and dismissive of the potential benefits of well-designed policies and minimise the importance of public safety concerns.

Historically, firearms control focused more on protecting the rights of responsible firearms owners rather than protecting society (McNair-Wilson MP, 1987). This is exemplified by Bobby’s comment in Section 6.4.1, where he stated that he did not

want to ban guns but wanted to ensure families were safe. Bobby's unique perspective as both a victim and shooter, encapsulates the enduring tension between individual rights and public safety.

Entrenched interests and cultural beliefs can create significant barriers to meaningful reform. The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) was unwilling to acknowledge that strengthening legislation could enhance public safety (Squires, 2000), and shooters rejected Cullen's 'cautious compromises' (Squires, 2016). However, as Jabot (2011) argued, human tragedy and suffering must take precedence over political considerations. This tension is particularly painful for victims and their families, who often feel that their experiences and losses are overshadowed by the competing interests of firearm owners (Eve, 2023).

7.4.3 Caught in the Crosshairs

Compromise had already cost the lives of 16 children and one adult in Dunblane (Ann Pearston cited in North, 2000, p. 168). A further 17 were badly injured, and many children and teachers who managed to escape without physical injuries were left with psychological scars (see Section 7.3.2). The incident might have only lasted three minutes (North, 1996a) however, its impact is likely to haunt them for the rest of their lives.

Mick noted how politicians often advise against emotional responses, Greenwood (2000) also suggested that rational policymaking is not feasible in an environment fraught with emotion. Yet it is precisely these emotions that shape firearms discourse. The emotional stakes of victims and their families are often contrasted with the perceived 'suffering' of firearm owners facing strict regulations, this illustrates how the debate often prioritises the rights of some over the safety and grief of others. Mick dismissed firearm owners perceived 'claimed right' to shoot and their complaints of being vilified and scapegoated (North, 2000, p. 166).

As argued by Macritchie (1997), a child's right to life should override any individuals right to own a firearm. In support of this, Pease and Pease (1999, p. 55) recalled how many felt that if the bereaved parents wanted the weapons that

killed their children banned ‘then so be it’. Firearms owners were merely being asked to consider their ‘sport’ in the wider context of public safety, recognising the collective danger of easy access to firearms (North, 2000, p. 166). This highlights a tension between firearm owners’ sense of victimisation, the broader societal responsibility to ensure public safety, and the perspectives of the victims.

The narratives of firearms owners frequently fail to acknowledge victims’ pain and loss. Graham’s comment about *“limiting the damage to their sports”* and Greenwood’s (2000) reference to the ‘loss of their sports, their rights ... and their loved property’, demonstrates a troubling lack of empathy. This perspective implies that their hobbies, dressed up as economically advantageous sports, are somehow equivalent to the loss suffered by victims. While hobbies can be replaced, there are no alternative lives for the children (North, 2000, p. 164).

The findings emphasise how cultural factors shape perceptions of and relationships with firearms. Individuals tend to make judgements that are consistent and congenial with their beliefs and strong cultural attachments can lead to resistance to legislative changes, emphasising firearms owners’ rights, at the expense of victims and their families.

7.5 Summary

“A line, albeit a thin one, was being drawn under the tragedy” (North, 2000, p. 111)

This chapter synthesised findings from the participant interviews and existing literature to explore the complex nature of PMS across Europe, utilising the MSF and a CR approach. Several key themes emerged regarding policy change following PMS, where the ‘something must be done’ phenomenon often influences how problems are framed, and which solutions are prioritised. Public policy is influenced by both the need to address issues, and politically to appear as though these issues are being solved, sometimes prioritising perception over actual solutions. While this often leads to swift action, it also raises questions about the effectiveness and longevity of such responses.

The analysis revealed not only conflicts within each stream but also tension between them. For instance, the urgency in the problem stream to address PMS often clashes with the policy stream's need for well-researched solutions. Similarly, culturally congenial beliefs in the politics stream can conflict with evidence-based problem definitions. The inter-stream conflicts further complicate the policymaking process, as actors must navigate competing pressures simultaneously. Policy entrepreneurs and process managers play crucial roles in attempting to align these conflicting streams, often facing challenges in reconciling immediate public demands with long-term policy effectiveness and political feasibility.

The analysis highlighted challenges in defining and categorising PMS, as conflicting definitions hinder understanding and response efforts. A more inclusive definition is proposed, considering the perpetrators' intent. Current definitions often focus narrowly on those who are fatally shot or injured, overlooking the wider repercussions of PMS, including collective trauma and the intergenerational effects on families. To address this gap, the proposed typology seeks to comprehensively capture the full extent of harm, encompassing the collective trauma experienced by those present, their families and the broader community. Additionally, the research revealed that firearms owners' rights are frequently prioritised over victims' rights, underscoring the need to centre/prioritise victims in how PMS are defined, categorised and responded to.

Finally, navigating the deeply entrenched attitudes towards firearms is crucial. Cultural attachments and societal norms significantly shape perceptions and responses to PMS. Effective policy reforms must confront these deeply held beliefs and cultural factors that complicate efforts to advocate for stricter control measures. Understanding the role of cultural cognition and congeniality helps to explain the polarised views and resistance to policy change. This approach highlights the need for policies that address deeply ingrained cultural beliefs while also considering the diverse experiences of those affected by PMS.

Chapter 8 will present the study's strengths and limitations, followed by its recommendations and contributions to the literature. It will then outline the

implications for policy, practice and future research before concluding with final reflections.

Chapter 8 : Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

This thesis explored how public mass shootings (PMS) are framed, conceptualised and go on to shape policy change. It has addressed four key objectives that include developing an in-depth understanding, examining relevant terminology, exploring policymaking and legislative responses, and initiating a conversation about effective responses. The study integrates multiple data sources, including participant interviews, case studies, policy and plenary debates, and email communications with the Belgian and Flemish Parliaments, that are not publicly available.

To conclude the study, this final chapter will begin by revisiting the research aim and questions guiding the study, before discussing the strengths and limitations, and presenting the researchers' reflections. It will then summarise the key findings and contributions, demonstrating how they advance existing knowledge and offer new insights into the complex dynamics surrounding PMS and policy responses. The chapter will contextualise the findings by linking them to existing academic literature, emphasising their practical applications and implications for policy and practice. It will also outline future research directions and recommendations before concluding with reflections on the study's overall significance.

8.2 Research Aim and Questions

The overarching research question is: *How are PMS framed and conceptualised and how does this shape policy/legislative change?*

Specific research questions guiding this study are:

RQ1: What is the nature and extent of PMS within the selected areas?

RQ2: What influences perceptions of event severity and subsequent responses?

RQ3: What factors (political, economic, cultural, location, victim status) matter and under what circumstances?

RQ4: How do narratives/discourse in parliamentary debates and the media influence policy change?

RQ5: How are PMS understood and responded to by participants?

The overarching aim was to comprehensively analyse PMS in Europe, their definitions, policy response and stakeholder perspectives to enhance understanding and inform future prevention and response approaches.

Methodology:

A mixed-method study was conducted, comprising an analysis of 18 case studies across four countries using Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF). This was complemented by an examination of open-source and historical data, relevant statistics, and interviews with key stakeholders possessing specific expertise and unique perspectives on the complex realities surrounding firearm violence and policy.

The research objectives were addressed through a multi-stage approach as follows:

1. Developing an in-depth understanding of PMS across Europe (Chapter 4)
2. Examining key terminology and definitions (Chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, 7)
3. Outlining the research design, data collection and analytical approach (Chapter 3)
4. Exploring policymaking and legislative responses using the MSF-Critical Realist (CR) framework (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7)
5. Analysing responses to PMS through participant interviews and case studies (Chapters 5, 6, 7)

This thesis provides an original and comprehensive account of PMS, addressing how such incidents are defined, framed and responded to. It integrates both conceptual and practical perspectives to offer a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and the implications for policy and practice.

8.3 Strengths, Limitations and Reflections

This study offers the first comprehensive analysis of PMS across multiple European countries using the MSF. Although a substantial body of research on PMS exists, predominantly from a US perspective (Fox and Levin, 2003; Doran,

2014; Hayes, 2018; Fox and Fridel, 2019; Lankford, 2019; Peterson and Densley, 2019; Luca, Malhotra and Poliquin, 2020; The Violence Project, 2024), few studies have examined these incidents and their policy responses using the MSF (Hristakopoulos, 2013). Although Hurka (2017) examined PMS across multiple countries, his analysis focused primarily on politicisation rather than employing the MSF. Similarly, Anisin's (2018; 2022; 2023) comparative work on offender motivations, is largely quantitative and does not incorporate the MSF.

By selecting four European countries and including PMS from an extended time period, this study analysed 18 events. This ensured there were opportunities to observe policy cycles, the cumulative effects of multiple PMS and subsequent responses, resulting in a rich dataset for comparative analysis. The mixed-methods approach integrated the MSF and CR with diverse sources, such as media reports, academic literature, policy documents and plenary debates. Insights from participants, including law enforcement officials, policymakers, interest group representatives and victims, provided unique perspectives on how PMS are defined, framed and responded to.

The explanatory strength of the MSF offers valuable insights into the policy process while acknowledging that responses to PMS are influenced, not only by public sentiment or statistical data, but also by political dynamics and interest groups. The CR approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of the contextual factors shaping firearms responses. It moved beyond surface-level analysis to enrich discussions about how societal perceptions and historical contexts influence policy. The purpose of the research was to develop an in-depth understanding of how PMS are defined, framed and responded to across Europe, exploring what events mattered under what circumstances, this thesis demonstrates that this aim has been successfully met.

However, this study also has limitations. Geographically, focusing on specific countries (the UK, Germany, Belgium, and Finland) may not fully capture the diversity of experiences and policy responses. Nonetheless, these countries were selected for their relevance to the research question and their differing cultural and political contexts. This selection allowed for meaningful comparisons that

contributed to a nuanced understanding of their political, social and cultural factors. Language barriers posed another limitation when studying countries outside of the UK. However, as discussed in Section 3.5.1, tools like Google Translate and email communications with members of the Belgian and Finnish Parliaments provided valuable information in English that might otherwise have been inaccessible.

The small sample size of 11 participants could limit the generalisability of findings to other contexts or countries. While a larger sample might have been advantageous for generalisation, participants were chosen to ensure a more in-depth analysis of perspectives leading to richer data. The qualitative nature of this study prioritised quality over quantity by focusing on specific groups. Semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method may be subject to recall bias or selective reporting by participants. Additionally, potential biases in participant selection and data interpretation must be considered. However, using multiple methods of data collection and analysis helped mitigate these issues by ensuring diverse perspectives were represented.

While Kingdon's MSF is a comprehensive framework for studying policy change, it does not fully address conflicts within the streams. Recent research has highlighted this limitation by introducing concepts such as problem brokers to enhance understanding of stream interactions (Knaggård, 2015), this study suggests expanding the framework to better address these conflicts.

A final limitation relates to the proposed definition of PMS requiring at least one fatality. This criterion is crucial for distinguishing severe events relevant for policy discussions, aligning with legal frameworks and existing databases, it nonetheless raises questions about inclusivity regarding victims. Changing the definition at this stage could alter the number of events included in the analysis, affecting the case studies and data.

Taking into consideration some of these limitations, one of the areas that could be explored differently should this research be replicated or approached again is to expand the geographical area. Originally the intention was to include case studies

from each region of Europe, including Albania, Serbia, Czech Republic, France, Switzerland and Sweden, however due to time and word constraints a decision was made to only include the four regions according to welfare regimes, if funding were available a translation service could be employed to include non-English speaking countries, additionally identifying a stakeholder from each area to interview would offer a broader range of ideological, cultural and political perspectives to combine with the case study data and expand understanding of PMS in those regions.

As this thesis concludes, reflecting on my positionality as a researcher is essential. The ontological stance of CR acknowledges both objective reality and subjective interpretation while emphasising reflexivity to enhance the validity of qualitative research. My upbringing in an environment largely devoid of firearms has shaped my critical perspective on their societal implications. This background has led to an emphasis on comprehensive policy responses that prioritise societal safety over the normalisation of firearms ownership. To mitigate potential biases introduced by my positionality, I engaged with diverse perspectives from victims, politicians, law enforcement officials and interest group representatives. Utilising multiple data sources, including interviews, academic literature, Hansard debates, and media articles, helped balance my analysis.

Finally, the qualitative nature of this research aimed to elicit rich data on this highly emotive topic. Perspectives from Mick and Bobby reinforced the need for heightened awareness and sensitivity in approaching this data.

8.4 Summary of Key Findings and Contributions to Knowledge

This research investigated the complex dynamics of PMS through the lens of Kingdon's (1984) MSF. It demonstrated how policy responses are shaped by interrelated streams, with PMS acting as critical catalysts for discussions around firearms legislation. Participants acknowledged the pivotal role of these events in drawing attention to issues and creating demand for solutions. The study highlights the importance of aligning the problem, policy and politics streams to capitalise on fleeting opportunities for change. The problem stream explains why some PMS prompt political action while others do not, whereas the policy and

politics stream clarify the processes leading to legislative change, with key actors, including policy entrepreneurs, problem brokers and process managers playing integral roles in this process. However, only seven of the 18 PMS studied led to significant policy change, emphasising the complexity of policymaking and the need for deeper exploration of influencing factors.

Baumgartner (2011, p. 953) suggests a limitation within the problem stream regarding the weak link between government attention and problem severity. This research challenges that notion by demonstrating that higher perceived severity, evidenced by fatality thresholds or victim 'value' can correlate with an increased likelihood of policy change, as seen in the case of Antwerp. Conversely, cases like Cumbria illustrate that even high fatality events may not lead to policy change, reinforcing Baumgartner's (2011) assertion about agenda setting complexities.

The MSF has been adapted by various scholars to deepen insights into those involved in the process and explore different stages of policy implementation (Herweg, Hub and Zohlnhöfer, 2015; Boswell and Rodrigues, 2016; Fowler, 2019). This study addresses recent criticisms of the MSF that highlight a lack of empirical research and inconsistent operationalisation of key concepts (DeLeo, Zohlnhöfer and Zahariadis, 2024) by providing a concrete application within the context of PMS and firearms policy. It enhances operationalisation of key concepts by refining definitions, developing a new typology of victims and incorporating cultural cognition into the politics stream.

Overall, this research contributes novel perspectives by addressing inter-stream conflicts and proposing specific solutions within the MSF. By systematically examining each stream, alongside focusing events and key actors, it directly addresses the research objective of examining policymaking and legislative responses to PMS. This comprehensive approach offers valuable insights into the dynamics of policy change in response to PMS while reinforcing how empirical findings align with and extend existing scholarship.

This novel integration of MSF and CR facilitated the exploration of diverse factors shaping responses to PMS, providing a nuanced understanding of the contextual

influences on policy development. This improves understanding of the urgent pressures that policymakers face that lead to hasty legislative actions, a finding aligned with Herweg, Zahariadis and Zohlnhöfer (2023), who note ineffective coupling of pre-existing solutions to identified problems (as discussed in Section 7.2.1).

This approach revealed insights into how cultural factors interact with policy windows created by PMS, demonstrating how ingrained beliefs influence coupling between problem and policy streams. Cognitive biases and cultural cognition shape perceptions of PMS as policy issues, affecting which solutions are considered viable. The findings support existing literature (Cao, Cullen, and Link, 1997; Braman and Kahan, 2003) by illustrating how intergenerational practices reinforce cultural attitudes that can lead to entrenched views on firearms.

Engaging with victims' perspectives addresses the fourth research objective by uncovering the interplay between individual experiences (agency) and broader social structures. This approach highlights how victim's experiences inform policy discussions and shape recovery processes, while providing valuable insights into personal and collective trauma associated with PMS. Overall, these findings underscore complex interactions among cultural factors, policy development, and societal responses to PMS. The integration of MSF and CR enhances explanatory power within policy studies, offering a more refined understanding of causal mechanisms in policy development.

The research has identified significant issues in defining and understanding PMS, proposing a more comprehensive definition that moves beyond simplistic fatality thresholds to consider perpetrator intent and collective trauma affecting individuals, families and communities. A new typology of victims is introduced to capture the full extent of harm caused by PMS.

These conceptual contributions directly address the second research objective by providing a thorough examination of key terminology and definitions. The findings align with existing literature (Harding, Fox and Mehta, 2002; Larkin, 2009; Kelly, 2010; Böckler *et al.*, 2013; Lankford, 2012; Nurmi, 2014a; Travers, McDonagh

and Elklit, 2018; Huff-Corzine and Corzine, 2020; Anisin, 2022b; Bridges, Tober and Brazzell, 2023; Daraklis *et al.*, 2024) which collectively demonstrates the absence of a standardised definition of PMS. The study further illustrates how problem framing influences agenda-setting and policy-formation in response to such incidents. The proposed definition and victim typology improve comparability across studies and strengthen the evidence base for policymaking related to PMS.

To my knowledge, this is the only study integrating insights from participant interviews with literature and theoretical frameworks such as the MSF and CR. It provides an empirical assessment based on a comprehensive data set including case studies, Hansard debates, and contributions from parliaments in Finland and Belgium. The methodological approach effectively addresses the research question, producing original findings.

The comparative nature of the research includes three distinct participant groups and four European countries with varying societal characteristics. This approach facilitated the identification of overarching themes and patterns, shedding light on how different countries address incidents of PMS. Key contributions included refinements to the MSF, addressing conflicts within and between the streams, concepts such as ‘cultural congeniality’ and the ‘something must be done’ phenomenon, which challenge traditional assumptions about rational policymaking. This aligns with Kingdon’s (1984) assertion that there is no systemic relationship between problems and solutions; urgency surrounding PMS responses can lead to adopting pre-existing solutions that may not adequately address root causes.

Engagement with diverse stakeholders, including victims, law enforcement officials, policymakers, researchers, and lobby/interest groups, represents a significant addition to existing literature on PMS and firearms violence. This comprehensive approach ensures findings are grounded in the realities faced by those directly involved in shaping firearms policies. By integrating case study data with participant interviews, this research offers a novel approach to understanding PMS and the complex dynamics of policy change. The combination of these two

methods allows for a holistic examination of both macro-level processes and micro-level perspectives.

By bridging policy process theories, with critical social science and connecting policy studies, sociology, psychology and criminology this research offers a nuanced perspective on the complex nature of PMS policy development. These contributions collectively advance existing literature by providing a comprehensive interdisciplinary framework for analysing PMS and related policy responses. They also challenge the assumption of a direct causal relationship between shooting severity and legislative action, emphasising instead the critical role of problem framing, policy solutions, and political dynamics in shaping policy outcomes.

8.5 Implications for Policy, Practice and Further Research

“we must not wait for another equally horrific event before we take the steps needed to bring the law up to date” (Kinnock MP, 2023)

This research has significant implications for policymaking in response to PMS, revealing the complex interplay of problem definition, policy solutions and political contexts. Understanding the MSF dynamics can help policymakers more effectively capitalise on policy windows, enhancing the timing and effectiveness of interventions. The study’s modifications to the MSF, including refined definitions and exploration of the ‘something must be done’ phenomenon, provide crucial insights into policy development. Additionally, integrating cultural cognition into policy approaches allows for more nuanced approaches that account for deeply held cultural beliefs about firearms. Policy entrepreneurs can strategically frame proposed solutions to resonate with local cultural values, potentially increasing their chances of adoption when policy windows open. Moreover, recognising how cultural factors influence problem perception enables policymakers to anticipate and address potential resistance to firearm control measures, creating more responsive and contextually sensitive policy interventions.

Adopting a more inclusive definition and victim typology has several important implications for policy and practice. This approach enables more accurate comparisons, comprehensive data collection, and better standardisation across studies, leading to a more nuanced understanding of PMS. Policymakers and

practitioners should incorporate this expanded framework within official guidelines and response protocols, potentially resulting in more comprehensive policy responses that address the full range of victims and impacts. This broader perspective can help reassess current approaches to PMS prevention and response, potentially identifying previously overlooked patterns and risk factors, strengthening the foundation for evidence-based decisions, and leading to more targeted and effective legislative responses. The new typology can also guide the development of a more comprehensive and tailored support services for a wider range of individuals affected by PMS, including those not physically injured. The study's novel integration of case study data with participant interviews provides a holistic examination of both macro-level processes and micro-level perspectives in PMS policy dynamics. This approach highlights the value of stakeholder engagement and interdisciplinary collaboration in developing effective responses to PMS. Future policy initiatives should address cultural divides and deeply held beliefs about firearms, considering diverse viewpoints and local contexts. To prevent hasty, politically expedient solutions driven by the 'something must be done' phenomenon, mechanisms should be established to promote evidence-based policymaking, even in periods of heightened political or public pressure.

The research advocates for a balanced approach to policymaking that considers evidence, cultural factors and victims' needs, recognising the varied and enduring impact of PMS. It acknowledges the need for further investigation into long-term effects of culturally sensitive policies and the role of problem framing in shaping policy outcomes. These insights provide a foundation for future research and policy development, ultimately fostering more holistic and effective strategies for prevention, response and victim support in addressing PMS.

The application of the MSF to PMS reveals its strengths in explaining policy adoption and limitations in predicting effectiveness. Future research should examine the long-term efficacy of policies enacted in response to PMS versus those developed through deliberative processes. Empirically testing the modified MSF across various countries and cultural settings, along with conducting longitudinal studies, would enhance understanding of how different political

systems and institutional contexts shape policy outcomes over time. These studies could assess the long-term effectiveness of policies and identify factors contributing to sustained policy success or failure. This research agenda seeks to validate and refine the proposed framework while contributing to more effective policymaking. It also addresses the research gap identified by Luca, Malhotra and Poliquin (2019), who highlight how political constraints have historically impeded efforts to reduce firearm violence.

Future research should adopt a broader, holistic approach to firearm violence, addressing three inter-related domains simultaneously; the intelligence picture, clear legislation and adequate resources for operational/law enforcement agencies (P7 Nils, 2017). An interdisciplinary perspective, integrating insights from criminology, psychology, public health, cultural studies and political science is essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of both PMS and broader issues of firearms violence. Particular attention should be directed toward the intersection of firearms, domestic violence against women and girls (VAWG) and PMS occurring in the private or domestic sphere. Future research should examine the relationship between firearms, VAWG, and toxic masculinity, with a specific focus on the firearms licensing and applications process, particularly in cases involving domestic abuse or intimate partner violence (IPV). Such inquiry would help to identify potential systemic failures, as highlighted by Bobby, and discussed in Chapter 4.

The proposed inclusive definition and victim typology necessitate further longitudinal research to better understand the longer-term consequences of PMS for individuals and communities (Rowhani-Rahbar, Zatzick and Rivara, 2019). This broader and more integrative approach to defining and analysing PMS reflects the growing recognition that such incidents are complex events with far-reaching social and psychological impacts. It underscores the need for evidence-based responses that address both immediate and enduring effects. Adopting a multifaceted research strategy could, in turn, inform the development of more effective, evidence-based policies and interventions capable of mitigating the occurrence and societal impact of firearm violence.

8.6. Recommendations

‘playing with guns means playing with lives, by people whose personal indulgence comes before assuming safety of communities’ (Dafydd Wigley, cited by North 2000, p. 103)

The findings and recommendations emerging from this research have the potential to shape policy discussions and drive positive change, addressing the complex challenges posed by PMS and firearms violence in Europe and beyond. Although the UK continues to experience comparatively low levels of PMS, the global increase in such incidents since 2010 (Silva, 2024), underscores the continued relevance and timeliness of this study.

Based on the interview data and the insights gained from participants, several recommendations can be put forward to address the challenges posed by PMS, and to improve policy responses. The research highlights significant flaws in the existing firearms licensing framework and the need for substantial improvements to enhance public safety and prevent policy failures. The current system is badly funded and not fit for purpose, and consequently, requires a comprehensive overhaul. Key recommendations include:

- 1) Adopt the proposed inclusive definition and victim typology to ensure that investigations capture a broader range of cases and facilitate improved data collection, analysis, and policy development across countries and contexts. This approach would enable more accurate cross-national comparisons and trend analyses, thereby supporting more robust, evidence-based decisions-making.
- 2) Implement full cost recovery for firearms licenses, with all associated costs met by licence holders. This recommendation aligns with the Labour Party’s 2024 manifesto and is supported by this research as a necessary measure to alleviate the current financial burden on police forces. At present, forces subsidise licensing processes by up to £10 million annually, whereas full cost recovery could generate approximately £20 million per year (Labour Party, 2024). The findings suggest that this additional revenue is essential to enhance both the efficiency and sustainability of the firearms licensing system.

3) Reduce the firearms licensing period to two years, contrary to proposal by shooting representative bodies to extend it (Home Office, 2023a). This recommendation reflects the difficulty of accurately assessing an individual's long-term suitability to possess firearms (North, 2000, p.171) and is supported by the research findings. Of the 18 PMS examined, 10, along with five of the six domestic or private shootings, were perpetrated using legally owned firearms, predominantly shotguns.

4) Establish a national firearms licensing unit responsible for overseeing processes across all police forces. This would enable more consistent performance monitoring, standardisation of decision-making processes, and the implementation of systems designed to streamline certification procedures, thereby reducing administrative delays and costs. Such a unit could help to alleviate existing backlogs in firearms licensing applications and improve waiting times. The combination of full cost recovery, a reduced licence period, and a centralised licensing unit would substantially strengthen the current system. The additional revenue generated could allow police forces to allocate greater resources to firearms licensing, facilitating improvements such as proactive monitoring, unannounced inspections, and enhanced inter-agency cooperation (Squires, 2022). Collectively, these recommendations align with the government's ongoing initiatives to raise additional funds and modernise firearms licensing guidance with a renewed emphasis on public safety.

5) Develop evidence-based strategies to address the root causes of PMS and firearms violence. Policymakers should focus on promoting public safety, adopting a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to firearm violence prevention that addresses both supply and demand factors, tailored to the specific societal, cultural and political contexts.

6) Ensure the provision of long-term support for PMS victims, recognising the profound psychological and emotional impacts of such events. Bobby's perspective as both a victim and advocate underscores the need for a comprehensive approach that extends beyond firearms legislation to address broader issues of safety, recovery, and the protection of life.

Implementing these recommendations will require sustained commitment and collaboration among researchers, policymakers and community stakeholders. While full cost recovery alone will not resolve all systemic challenges, it represents a critical step toward establishing a more adequately funded and fit for purpose licensing system that enhances both operational capacity and public safety.

These recommendations aim to improve the current system; however, some argue for more drastic measures, including a complete ban on private firearms ownership. As Mick, a victim and advocate, suggests, firearms are intrinsically dangerous to the public; the greater the number in circulation, the higher the likelihood they will be misused. Therefore, it follows that the fewer firearms in circulation, the safer the public will be (GCN, 2022). North powerfully encapsulated this sentiment, arguing that “one of the greatest commemorations to our children would be the total lawful ban of firearms from households throughout the UK” (North, 2000, p. 121 (letter published in Scotland on Sunday 7th April 1996)).

Ultimately, no hobby can be valued above the life of an innocent child or indeed any individual, and these recommendations aim to prioritise public safety and prevent future tragedies.

8.7 Concluding Thoughts

This study offers the first comprehensive exploration of PMS across multiple European countries, using the MSF and CR to deepen understanding of how individual actions, societal factors, and situational arrangements interact to influence policy change. The research revealed that PMS serve as focusing events, acting as catalysts for policy change by drawing attention to critical issues and creating demand for solutions. Policy responses are shaped by independent yet interrelated streams, with key actors, including policy entrepreneurs, problem brokers and process managers playing integral roles in this complex process.

Notably, only seven of the 18 PMS examined resulted in significant policy change, emphasising the complexity of the policymaking process and the need to examine which events matter under what circumstances. This study introduces new concepts, ‘cultural congeniality’ and the ‘something must be done’ phenomenon,

which challenge traditional assumptions of rational policymaking. Cognitive biases, cultural cognition and deeply embedded beliefs surrounding firearms ownership emerge as critical factors that shape which policy solutions are considered politically and socially viable.

The research critically exposed how the urgency surrounding responses to PMS often results in the adoption of pre-existing policy solutions that fail to adequately address the underlying causes. This underscores the paramount importance of prioritising all victims in policy discussions and proposals, recognising that those left behind must continue to live with the enduring consequences of these tragic events.

As this thesis concludes, it is also important to reflect on my own journey and how it has shaped the research process. My initial understanding of firearms was limited and primarily informed by media representations. However, through sustained engagement with participants, case materials, and the broader academic literature, my knowledge and perspective have evolved substantially over the course of this study.

Beginning in January 2015, this research journey has taken longer than I anticipated, during which time it has been marked by both challenges and opportunities. Due to ill health, I made the difficult decision to suspend my studies uncertain if I would be able to resume. However, after a change in employer, university and members of my supervisory team I was ready to begin again. I balanced a part-time PhD with full time work, developing crucial skills and attributes that have contributed to the production of this thesis.

Working as a research assistant on the EFFECT project studying gun-enabled crime sparked the initial interest in firearms, leading to undertaking a PhD in this area. I attended the University of Northampton's Centre for the Reduction of Firearms Crime, Trafficking and Terrorism event, and attended conferences held by the Flemish Peace institute and also collaborated with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on the Education for Justice initiative, additionally presenting on an expert panel alongside key stakeholders. This progressively

expanded my network whilst exposing me to a wealth of knowledge from experts, academics and practitioners in the field.

These experiences provided a measured series of perspectives, transforming my approach from one based on mediated, ill-informed 'knowledge' to a more evidence-based understanding. The collective expertise has broadened by comprehension of this complex and important topic, ultimately making this thesis not just possible, but significantly more robust and insightful.

The findings and recommendations have the potential to shape policy discussions and drive positive change, addressing the complex challenges posed by PMS and firearm violence in Europe and beyond, and ultimately, they could also limit both the number of firearms available for public use, and by extension, the number of victims of firearm violence. In light of these findings, it is essential to reflect on the profound human cost of PMS, as poignantly expressed by Mick:

'for the sake of her fifteen dead friends, her teacher, all her other poor classmates, all the children at Dunblane Primary and Sophie herself, please no more guns and certainly no more worship of guns' (North, 2000, p.111)

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Zhang, Y., Shah, D., Foley, J., Abhishek, A., Lukito, J., Suk, J., Kim, S.J., Sun, Z. and Pevehouse, J. (2019) 'Whose Lives Matter? Mass Shootings and Social Media Discourses of Sympathy and Policy. 2012-0214', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 24, pp.182-202.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Consent Form

A Comparative Analysis of Public Mas Shootings: which events matter under which circumstances?

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1.	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Participant Information Sheet dated _____.	☐
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	☐
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in this research, exploring PMS and how they are framed and conceptualised and how this shapes policy/legislative change.	☐
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	☐
5.	I am aware that I will be required to participate in a semi-structured interview where I will be asked a series of questions.	☐
6.	I agree to the researcher making audio recordings during the project.	☐
7.	I understand how the data collected will be used, and the use of the data in research, and publications has been explained to me.	☐
8.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	☐
9.	Select only one of the following:	☐
	I would like my name used and understand what I have said as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised.	☐

	I do not want my name used in this project. I understand that I can change my mind at any time, without having to provide a rationale.	
10.	I agree that should I withdraw from the study, the data collected up to that point may be used by the researcher for the purposes described in the information sheet.	☐

Participant:

 Name of Participant Signature Date

Researcher:

 Name of Researcher Signature Date

Contact:

If you have any further queries regarding the study, please contact Sarah Watson - sarah.watson@research.staffs.ac.uk. Alternatively, you can speak to my supervisor Dr Helen Poole - helen.poole@staffs.ac.uk, Principal Supervisor, JSS, Staffordshire University, Leek Road, Staffordshire, ST4 5DF

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

A Comparative Analysis of Public Multiple Shootings (PMS): which events matter under which circumstances?

A research project exploring Public Mass Shootings (PMS), how they are framed and conceptualized, and how this shapes policy/legislative change.

Introduction

I would like to invite you to participate in this project, which is concerned with how PMS are framed and conceptualised, and how this shapes policy/legislative change. Before you decide I will explain why the research is being conducted and what it will involve for you. I will go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions that you may have. This should take about 10 minutes. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear, you will be given time to decide if you wish to take part before you must make a decision, and you may keep this sheet.

What is the purpose of the study/project?

I am a part-time research student at Staffordshire University, and the research is being conducted as part of my PhD. The aims of the research are to assess perspectives on PMS, policy and legislative responses to PMS and their implementation.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been selected because of your knowledge and expertise in relation to firearms misuse/crime and/or control and/or because of the field in which you work/research.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary. I will describe the study and go through the information sheet, which I will give to you, I will then ask you to sign a consent form to show you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. If you choose to withdraw from the study, it may not be possible or desirable for data already provided to be removed or destroyed, and as such it may be included in the research.

What is expected from participants?

Participation will involve one interview lasting one hour. Interviews will be conducted either in person, in a location where privacy can be assured, and the interview will not be interrupted or where/if this is not possible, they will be conducted via Teams. They will take place in a private place, at a time and place to be confirmed that is convenient for you. The interviews will be recorded with a Dictaphone. This will be kept with any notes in a locked filing cabinet that only I will have access to.

What are the potential disadvantages or risks of taking part?

The research is low risk, and it is not envisaged that you will experience any harm, discomfort, or distress. However, should you feel uncomfortable at any point, we can pause or stop and if necessary, we can resume at a later point.

What are the potential benefits of taking part?

Whilst the research may be of wider benefit, and the information I may get from the study will help to increase the understanding of PMS and policy/legislative change, I cannot promise that it will directly benefit you.

Will my taking part in the study/project be kept confidential?

All information supplied will be confidential unless you consent to its disclosure. Should you wish for your name to be used, you will confirm this in the consent form. If you do not wish for your name to be used, then all identifying information will be removed and you will be given a pseudonym/number, so that you are not identifiable by any information. In addition, access to the data will be restricted and only my supervisors and I will have access to it. Interviews will take place in private, they will be recorded with a Dictaphone, and when not in use this will be kept in a locked filing cabinet that only I have a key to, along with the notes.

What if I do not wish to answer a question?

You do not have to answer any question you are not comfortable with; you are free to decline to answer, and you do not have to give a reason.

What will happen if I do not want to carry on with the study?

You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. If you choose to withdraw from the study, it may not be possible or desirable for data already provided to be removed or destroyed, and as such it may be included in the research.

What will happen to the results of the project?

The results of the project will be published in the final thesis. A final copy of the thesis will be made available to you.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am organising the research, and it is being funded by Staffordshire University.

What if there is a problem?

If there are any concerns or complaints, please refer to the contact details below.

Contact details

If you are affected by any of the issues discussed, or if you have any queries, please contact Sarah Watson - sarah.watson@research.staffs.ac.uk, (the researcher). Alternatively, you can speak to Dr Helen Poole - helen.poole@staffs.ac.uk, Principal Supervisor, JSS (Justice, Security and Sustainability), Staffordshire University, Leek Road, Staffordshire, ST4 5DF.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed and approved by Staffordshire University Research Ethics Committee

How will my data be processed?

Your data will be processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR).

The data controller for this project will be Staffordshire University. The university will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. The legal basis for processing your personal data for research purposes under the GDPR is a 'task in the public interest.' You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this study by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance with the GDPR. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure, objection, and data portability. Questions, comments, and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the Staffordshire University Data Protection Officer. If you wish to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk.

Appendix 3: University of Staffordshire Ethical Approval

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

A Comparative Analysis of Public Mass Shootings: which events matter under which circumstances?

Hi, I am Sarah Watson, thank you for agreeing to participate in this project, which is concerned with how Public Mass Shootings (PMS) are framed and conceptualised and how this shapes policy/legislative change. The interview will help me by allowing me to **assess your perspective on PMS, and policy and legislative responses to PMS** and their implementation and your views **regarding the future development of firearms directives**. The interview should last approximately an hour. You have already given your permission for the interview to be recorded, and I have outlined the procedures for ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. If you could please introduce yourself and then the interview will begin.

1. What is the organization that you work for, your job title, responsibilities and time with the organisation?
2. Please tell me a little bit about your organisation and how it fits into the national agenda for combating gun crime.
3. In which country do you work?
4. What is your understanding of the level of crime using firearms?
5. and the nature and extent of gun crime?
6. What do you understand about firearm legislation within your country?
7. To what extent do you believe legislation is clear and consistent?
8. and understood?
9. In your opinion is current legislation and policy effective in reducing the risk of firearms to citizens? (what evidence exists?)
10. What are the challenges to the effective policing of gun crime in Europe?

11. What is your knowledge/understanding of PMS? Definitions/extent of?
12. How are PMS framed and by who? in terms of responsibility (individual, media, society, policy?)
13. What influences the perceived severity of the event, and subsequent responses to it? (weapons, number of victims, age?)
14. How do PMS compare geographically/are there any distinct similarities/differences?
15. How is discourse relating to causal factors shaped? (and by who?) how are PMS discussed in relation to responsibility and the causal factors? (and by who?)
16. Considering PMS in other countries, US/Finland (school shootings) and suggestions of copycat cases, what role does the media play? (should we avoid publicising the act/perpetrator – would this limit the opportunity for PMS in the future?)
17. What role, if any, does movie violence or violent video games play, given the attention they receive?
18. What role, if any, do gun cultures play/what is the relationship between gun cultures and PMS?
19. Can you give an example of event-driven legislation? a PMS that resulted in legislative change?
20. If we think about the 'event-driven' nature of much of the legislation, how far have gun crime/PMS incidents prompted legal changes?
21. To what extent is knee-jerk, event/incident driven legislation successful in preventing future PMS
22. What is the role of the media in legislative responses?
23. What is the role of the public in legislative responses?

24. What is the role of politics in legislative responses?
25. What impact do you think/to what extent do you believe gun control lobby organisations have an impact on legislative responses
26. Given they can slow down the process, how helpful is it that lobby groups are widely consulted on legislative change?
27. To what extent do you think legislative responses to PMS are sufficient
28. What do you think public opinion is on legislative responses?
29. Are there countries we can learn from?
30. What factors do you think will shape the future direction of EU firearms policy?
31. What assists and impedes the development and implementation of gun crime legislation?
32. What factors make the process of implementing legislation more difficult? (recent national conflict, economic pressures).
33. If you had one recommendation on how gun crime/PMS could be prevented (within your country/elsewhere) what would this be?

Is there anything else which we have not covered which you think might be relevant?

Are you happy for me to contact you at a later date if I have additional questions?

Thank you for your time.

Appendix 5: Communication with Belgian Parliament

Appendix 6: Communication with Finnish Parliament

Appendix 7: Communication from Finnish Parliament

Appendix 8: Domestic Shootings

(Authors own data)

Appendix 9: Case Studies Including Causal Factor and Legal Status

(Authors own data)

Appendix 10: Overview of Case Studies

(Authors own data)

Appendix 11: Firearms Classification

(Source: Jenzen-Jones, 2021)

Appendix 12: Publications and Conferences

Publications

Watson, S., Squires, P., Poole, H., and Treadwell, J. (2023) 'Mass Shootings: Defining by Numbers and the Implications for Policy', *Papers from the British Criminology Conference*. Available at: <https://www.britisoccrim.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/BSC-Online-Journal-2023.pdf>.

Watson, S. (2022) 'Mass Shootings, Fatality Thresholds and Defining by Numbers: Political and Social Consequences' *Criminology and Criminal Justice*. 1-9

Watson, S., and Bolton- King, R., (2021) 'Responding to Firearm Crime. in *Firearms: Global Perspectives on Consequences, Crime and Control*'. Ed. by Poole, H., and Sneddon, S. Oxford: Routledge.

Watson, S. (2021) 'The Impact of Firearms on Society and Development'. in *Firearms: Global Perspectives on Consequences, Crime and Control*'. Ed. by Poole, H., and Sneddon, S. Oxford: Routledge.

Squires, P., Poole, H., Chilton, J., Watson, S., and Williamson, H. (2020) '[Illegal Firearms in Europe and the UK – Stemming the Tide?](#) - review article'. *Journal of Criminology and Forensic Studies*. 3 (1).

Squires, P., Poole, H., Chilton, J., Watson, S., and Williamson, H. (2020) 'Guns in the UK and Europe - A Hidden Time Bomb?' in Esparza, Ricart and Vargas (Ed.) *Gun Trafficking and Violence: from the global network to the local security challenge* (forthcoming Palgrave MacMillan).

Watson, S. (2015) '[To what extent is there scope for a common EU policy on firearms controls?](#)' *Papers from the British Criminology Conference*. 15, pp. 77-92.

Conference Presentations

Watson, S. (2015) Oral Presentation: British Criminology Conference, Plymouth University, 1-3 July 2015.

Watson, S. (2015) Oral Presentation/Panel: European Society of Criminology Conference, University of Porto, Portugal, 2-5th September 2015

Watson, S. (2018) Oral Presentation/Panel: UNODC Expert Group Meeting to Peer Review E4J Modules, Panama City, Panama, July 5-7th 2018

Watson, S. (2022) Oral Presentation: Centre for Crime Justice and Security Conference. Staffordshire University, October 2022

Watson, S. (2023) Oral Presentation: British Criminology Conference, UCLAN University, 27-30 June 2023

Appendix 13: Personal and Professional Development