

What Gun Rights Voters Want In 2016

*An Unprecedented Look Inside The
NRA's Private Polling Data*

The Choice in 2016

Anti-gun Clinton faces electorate that values guns for personal security

By THE WASHINGTON TIMES

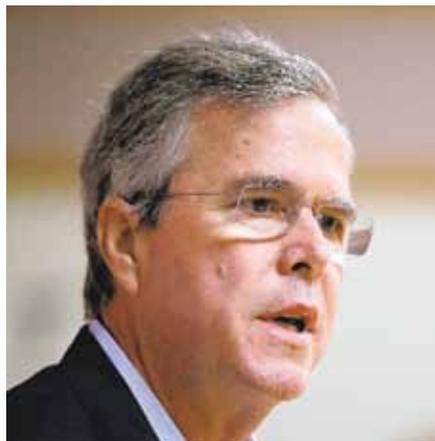
The Pew Research Center recently released poll data showing that today, 63 percent of Americans believe having a firearm in their home is the best way to protect themselves and their families from crime. Only 30 percent disagreed. These numbers, released just two years after the tragic school shootings in Connecticut and the Obama administration's ultimately unsuccessful attempt to persuade Congress to enact new gun control laws, underscores the importance of the firearms debate on American politics.



Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton (AP Photo/Charlie Neibergall)

many cases, their voting records to the contrary. The photos of presidential candidate John Kerry goose hunting, U.S. Senate candidate Jean Carnahan on the skeet field (with price tags still hanging on her shooting vest, no less) and President Obama's targeted 2012 television ads declaring his support for the Second Amendment and promising that "I will never take your guns" reflect this reality.

Second Amendment issues became something of a political football in the late 1960s, as what is often today called the "culture war" developed between the



Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush (AP Photo/Charlie Neibergall)

ads, as well as on posters and billboards. Others who dismiss NRA support as unimportant, or who believe voters in their state or district are less influenced by the gun vote, attack the NRA and the concept of the "right to keep and bear arms" -- often at their political peril.

In Maryland's 2014 gubernatorial election, for example, the Democratic Lt. Governor seeking to succeed Martin O'Malley ran ad after ad attacking Larry Hogan, the eventual winner, for receiving the NRA endorsement.

The NRA Institute for Legislative



Republican presidential candidate Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla. (AP Photo/David Goldman)

Va.-based OnMessage, Inc. and directed by the firm's polling director, Wes Anderson. Anderson has been in the polling business for more than 20 years, serving as Haley Barbour's polling director when he chaired the Republican National Committee and directing the National Republican Senatorial Committee's 2010 Independent Expenditure program. He has polled in past years for dozens of Senate, House and gubernatorial candidates.

The findings are interesting not just from a historic perspective, but for what they tell us about the potential impact



Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

The role of hunters, shooters and firearms owners in national, state and even local elections has been hotly debated for years. National Rifle Association leaders have maintained since the late 1960s, when the NRA first became active in electoral politics, that Second Amendment supporters generally -- and particularly those who look to the NRA for leadership -- often make the difference in elections at the national, state and local levels. On the other side, NRA critics--like former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg--insist that the NRA's influence and the importance of the so-called "gun vote" is more hype than reality. As a result, most gun control advocates spend a good deal of time trying to play down its influence.

Ironically, many Democratic leaders over the years have tended to agree more with the NRA's claims than with those of their liberal, anti-gun party allies. Before leaving office in 2001, for example, then-President Bill Clinton famously traced his Vice President's failure to win the White House to the NRA vote, which he claimed cost Al Gore five states and the presidency.

In races since 2000, many candidates, fearing the consequences of being perceived as anti-Second Amendment, have tried to position themselves as pro-gun, pro-hunting and as strong Second Amendment supporters -- despite, in

left and right. Until that time, there was little partisan difference on such issues and little real debate over the meaning of the Second Amendment.

A perfect example of this is President John F. Kennedy, who was actually an NRA Life Member. That all changed with the passage of the Gun Control Act of 1968, during the waning days of the Johnson Administration, and was soon followed by a proposal from President Nixon's Attorney General, which called for a ban on the private ownership of handguns. "Gun control" was assumed at the time to be extremely popular and superficial poll data convinced politicians that the public wanted more restrictions on firearms ownership.

Politicians at the time didn't foresee the backlash on the horizon. Millions of pro-gun voters mobilized and the NRA, which didn't even have a political or lobbying arm until 1975, began speaking out. Within just a few years, the polls began turning and anti-gun politicians began losing their elections as a result.

Still, until now, much of the evidence of the impact of Second Amendment voters has been anecdotal, although strong enough to influence political decisions among many candidates of both parties. Democrats and Republicans alike, particularly at the state and local levels, value the NRA endorsement and those who get it often tout it in broadcast and print

Action (ILA), is responsible for all NRA lobbying and political campaign activity (along with the NRA's federal political action committee, the NRA Political Victory Fund) and is headed by Chris Cox. Whenever someone is referring to the political or election activities of NRA, they are essentially talking about the ILA arm.

Operating out of offices in Washington, DC and Fairfax, Va., ILA, like most professionally sophisticated political organizations, polls extensively before and during elections to frame its message and mobilize Second Amendment voters. In recent years, it has also enlisted a number of independent, experienced independent pollsters to conduct extensive post election polls to measure the impact of its efforts and the gun vote in targeted races.

This year, for the first time, Cox has shared much of this data with The Washington Times, which provides the basis of this special report. This data explodes a number of myths about the importance of the Second Amendment vote and provides empirical evidence that NRA supporters are not limited to a small niche of the American electorate. The "gun vote," it turns out, is an important factor in races across the country, despite the fact that some experts in the past have chosen to dismiss it.

The NRA's post-election survey work in 2014 was done by the Alexandria,

of Second Amendment issues on the 2016 Presidential contest. The NRA is unlikely to get involved at the primary stage, according to Cox, because all the GOP candidates running for their party's nomination have proven both rhetorically and based on their records reliable Second Amendment supporters. In the 2016 general election, however, the NRA could play a decisive role.=

Hillary Clinton, the likely Democratic nominee, has a long record of opposition to the NRA and as a gun control advocate. In the early days of the Obama Administration, her State Department let it be known that the United States would not longer object to a Small Arms Trade Treaty that might impact US civilian gun owners rights. As a result, the UN did approve a treaty which was later signed by her successor as Secretary of State, but has yet to be submitted to the Senate for ratification. Republican and Democratic Senators alike have raised questions about the treaty's potential impact on traditional Second Amendment rights and have vowed to prevent its ratification.

Given her record and the fact that as resident she would be able to make judicial appointments that could lead to a reversal of the Supreme Court's current interpretation of the Second Amendment, the NRA could be in a position to mobilize and deliver more votes in November of next year than at any time in its history.

Debunking the gun control myths with real voter polling

By DAVID KEENE

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

As president of the National Rifle Association during the days following the tragic school shootings in Newtown, Connecticut, I was on the front lines defending Second Amendment rights against President Barack Obama, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and a network of gun control advocates who used that tragedy to promote a gun control agenda that, had it been in place on Dec. 14, 2012, would not have prevented the tragedy.

Obama and his allies in Congress and on the outside realized early on that to win the campaign to enact new gun control laws, they would have to convince those serving in Congress that the NRA was a paper tiger that could be ignored. The refrain began at the top and was repeated almost daily.

“The NRA may once have represented American sportsmen and women; it may once have reflected the views of its members on Second Amendment issues, but the world has changed, and that’s no longer the case.” The public was told, using questionable poll data provided by Mayor Bloomberg’s acolytes, that “most” NRA members agreed not with the association of which they were members, but with President Obama.

I was constantly asked as I traveled the country why the NRA used to support American shooters, but was today nothing but a shill for the firearms



industry from which we received the bulk of our financial support. This one was easily answered. The NRA, and particularly the NRA Foundation, does receive support from firearms manufacturers and distributors, but on average that support amounts to about 3 percent of the association’s budget. And none of it goes to advocacy or political activity.

The anti-NRA drumbeat was orchestrated because the president and his allies knew that to win they would have to demonize, defang or sideline the organization and its then-4 million members, or at least convince wavering politicians that the organization is no longer relevant. I remember watching PBS the night that Obama spoke and listening to Mark Shields, a reliable Obama supporter, suggest that the NRA was no longer a force to be reckoned because it was imploding as its members were abandoning it due to its opposition to

the president’s agenda.

That day, as the president spoke, some 58,000 Americans picked up their phones to join the NRA, and hundreds of thousands of Second Amendment supporters from coast to coast were planning rallies, marches and telephone campaigns to let the politicians know just where they stood. By the time it was over, agree or not with the NRA, politicians from Washington to Denver knew that gun owners and sportsmen and sportswomen did not support the Obama/Bloomberg agenda and were prepared, as they had time after time, to stand with the NRA.

When I stepped down as president of the NRA in 2013, the membership had swollen to more than 5 million men and women from all walks of life, and liberal pundits were wondering why, when a political battle over gun control ended, public support for firearms ownership usually increased. In the wake of tragedies like what happened at Sandy Hook, gun control aficionados believe they can ride a wave of popular outrage to achieve their interim and long-term goals, which include everything from bans on firearms, universal registration and eventual confiscation to “a gun-free society.”

During the debates that ensued, however, Americans actually focused on the arguments of the two sides and rejected much of what Obama and his allies proposed as contrary to the Constitution, unworkable and, perhaps just as important, nonsensical.

The post-Sandy Hook debate went the way it did for these very reasons. The longer it went on, the clearer it was to the public and to those elected to represent the public that the new proposed restrictions would not have prevented the tragedy being exploited to promote them and would do little, if anything, to reduce either crime or future such incidents. At the same time, as people contemplated the importance of the Second Amendment and the fact that many millions of Americans not only enjoy the shooting sports but rely on their right to own a gun as their final line of defense for themselves, their families and their property, they rejected the restrictions being proposed.

Gun control advocates have convinced themselves that few Americans really care deeply about the Second Amendment or have been conned by the NRA, which has, in turn, convinced politicians that it speaks for millions of Americans who not only care, but will vote for or against candidates based on their Second Amendment record.

The importance of the exit polls released this week by the NRA is that they show not only that the Second Amendment is an important issue to millions of Americans, but that the NRA is viewed as a trustworthy leader on these issues. It’s that trust, and the tens of millions of voters who look to the NRA for leadership, that makes the NRA endorsement so important to men and women seeking public office — and why politicians listen.

HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION 2014 EXIT POLLING

FINDING ONE

Voters in four key election races had a strong favorable view of the NRA. Here’s the breakdown:

- Iowa’s 3rd congressional district: 53 percent favorable, 36 percent unfavorable.
- Arizona’s 2nd congressional district: 47 percent favorable, 40 percent unfavorable
- U.S. Senate race in North Carolina: 51 percent favorable, 42 percent unfavorable
- U.S. Senate race in Colorado: 51 percent favorable, 38 percent unfavorable.

FINDING TWO

In those four races, the NRA and its advertising was considered more trustworthy and credible than other outside groups running ads. Here’s the breakdown.

North Carolina Senate:

- 54 percent trusted NRA
- 52 percent trusted U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- 40 percent trusted the National Republican Senatorial

Committee

- 20 percent trusted Michael Bloomberg’s Everytown for Gun Safety

Colorado Senate:

- 55 percent trusted NRA
- 35 percent trusted NRSC
- 42 percent trusted Chamber
- 19 percent trusted Bloomberg group

Iowa 3rd District:

- 60 percent trusted NRA
- 50 percent trusted National Republican Congressional Committee
- 52 percent trusted Chamber
- 26 percent trusted Bloomberg group

Arizona 2nd District:

- 49 percent trusted NRA
- 42 percent trusted NRCC
- 48 percent trusted the Chamber
- 28 percent trusted Bloomberg group

FINDING THREE

NRA delivered a majority of the winning vote in each race:

Colorado Senate:

- Actual vote: 49 percent for Republican Cory Gardner, 46 percent for Democrat Mark Udall
- NRA supporters made up 51 percent of total vote
- NRA supporters voted 79 percent for Gardner, 17 percent for Udall

North Carolina Senate Race

- Actual vote: 49 percent for Republican Thom Tillis, 47 percent for Democrat Kay Hagan
- NRA supporters made up 49 percent of total vote
- NRA Supporters: 78 percent for Tillis, 16 percent for Hagan

Iowa 3rd Congressional District

- Actual vote: 53 percent for Republican David Young, 42 percent for Democrat Traci Appel
- NRA supporters made up 52 percent of total vote
- NRA supporters: 81 percent for Young, 14 percent for Appel

Arizona 2nd Congressional District

- Actual vote: 50.1 percent for Republican Martha McSally, 49.9 percent for Democrat Ron Barber
- NRA supporters made up 48 percent of total vote
- NRA supporters: 82 percent McSally, 18 percent for Barber

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

NRA's Chris Cox sees surge in gun rights support heading into 2016

By KELLY RIDDELL

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The National Rifle Association is planning a major voter-outreach program for the 2016 presidential election, buoyed by its success in targeted elections last year and hoping to capitalize on Americans' growing belief that gun ownership will make them safer as fear of crime rises, its chief lobbyist says.

"As people learn more, and take a more serious approach toward their own security and the failure of the criminal justice system, they see these rare but horrific crimes. Whether you support or hate the Second Amendment, everyone wants something done," Chris Cox, the executive director of the NRA Institute for Legislative Action, told *The Washington Times*.

"We now have carry laws across the country — not all great laws. But the doomsday prediction — that more guns are going to be the end of the world as we know it, more people will be shooting firearms and doing crazy things — simply hasn't materialized. Law-abiding people have the right to their own protection," he said in an interview.

For the first time in more than two decades, more Americans say that protecting gun rights is more important than controlling gun ownership by a margin of 52 percent to 46 percent, according to a Pew Research poll.

This finding comes after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings in Connecticut and some other high-profile rampages that the White House used to argue for a full-court press for gun control despite statistically lower crime rates overall.

Still, the majority of Americans don't feel safe, and that perception has only grown during President Obama's term of office, according to the polling.

"In short, we are at a moment when most Americans believe crime rates are rising and when most believe gun ownership — not gun control — makes people safer," Pew wrote in an April 17 report.

Support for gun control has had the sharpest decline among whites who see crime on the rise: Just 37 percent of those who now say crime is rising say they favor stricter gun control, compared with 78 percent who said the same in 1990, the Pew report said.

Pew's poll also shows support for the NRA is increasing — the gun rights lobby had its second-largest national convention last month, and its membership has reached 5 million.

The NRA proved its muscle in the 2014 election cycle, helping to rally a decisive victory for gun rights supporters, especially



Chris Cox, executive director of the Institute for Legislative Action, the political and lobbying arm of the National Rifle Association, speaks during the annual meeting of members at the NRA convention Saturday, April 11, 2015, in Nashville, Tenn. (AP Photo/Mark Humphrey)

in hotly contested races like the U.S. House seat in Arizona once held by shooting victim and gun control advocate Gabrielle Giffords.

There are more than 100 million gun owners in America who identify with different political parties, but all of whom feel their freedom is under attack, Mr. Cox said.

"What gun control groups fail to realize is gun owners aren't just a loyal voting bloc ... they're a very savvy one, and they don't like to be lied to," said Mr. Cox. "There's this realization — gun owners know their rights are under attack — but there's a bigger issue out there: that people are feeling suffocated, whether its businesses being stifled from regulation, Obamacare or being told how much soda we can drink. There's been an overreach into our personal freedom. It's a serious issue, and people are taking notice."

The NRA was successful in more than 90 percent of the races in which it played, demonstrating that it can run television ads and support candidates in urban districts without collateral damage, Mr. Cox said.

Although Americans for Responsible Solutions (ARS), a gun control group founded by Mrs. Giffords and her husband, Mark Kelly, poured \$2 million in trying to re-elect her former district director, Ron Barber, to her former Arizona congressional seat, NRA-backed candidate Martha McSally won the race in a runoff in what was one of the most hotly contested races of the election cycle.

The NRA rallied grass-roots support for Mrs. McSally's campaign and ran direct mail on Second Amendment rights. NRA internal exit poll data from that race shows

37 percent of Mrs. McSally's votes came from people who said they were in direct opposition to Mr. Barber and Mr. Obama's gun control policies. And toward the end of the race, ARS — fearing backlash — pulled its gun control television spots from the air.

"On the ground during the campaign, it definitely felt like those anti-Second Amendment ads certainly didn't hurt us and did more to gin up Second Amendment supporters than anything," said Patrick Ptak, communications director for Mrs. McSally.

ARS declined to comment to *The Times*. That support for the Second Amendment was an advantage that held equally true in Colorado in 2014.

Exit polling showed that 51 percent of those who voted in the Senate race there said they supported the goals and objectives of the NRA. Thirty-eight percent said they voted for Republican and NRA-backed Cory Gardner over Mark Udall "to show opposition to the Obama-Mark Udall gun-control agenda."

"With these results we are able to demonstratively show what we've said all along — that the NRA, come election season, is not a niche group or niche message, it's not 4 [percent] or 5 percent of the electorate, it goes to 40 percent to 60 percent of all voters," Mr. Cox said.

Still, gun control groups are also optimistic.

Michael Bloomberg donated \$50 million of his personal fortune to get his group Everytown for Gun Safety combating the NRA last year. And Giffords-affiliated gun control groups raised and spent about

\$27 million in the midterm cycle trying to influence elections, according to federal elections data compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics.

That compares to the \$28 million the NRA decided to spend on 2014 elections, according to the same data set.

"In candidate races, more than 85 percent of our endorsed candidates won election," said Erika Soto Lamb, a spokeswoman for Everytown in an email statement to *The Times*. "In governor races in states that passed background check legislation since Newtown, candidates who support gun safety were victorious."

One clear victory for Everytown was in Washington state, where the background check ballot initiative passed with 60 percent of the vote.

"Our supporters took the fight to keep our children safe from gun violence to a new grass-roots level — and the election results show that while the gun lobby can bully politicians, they can't bully the American people at the voting booth," Ms. Soto Lamb said.

The NRA is disappointed in losing that ballot initiative but simply couldn't match the resources Everytown poured into the state's ballot initiative, Mr. Cox said.

"That was a unique state being led by billionaires being able to raise \$12 [million] to \$15 million to mislead people on the facts," Mr. Cox said. "We were outspent overwhelmingly. Our money comes from \$5 and \$10 dollar donations from our members."

According to Washington state federal election disclosures, the NRA spent \$485,000 in Washington. In an October 2014 press release, Everytown said it spent more than \$4 million to support the state's ballot initiative, with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation pitching in another \$1 million.

Now the NRA is headed into its next battle, a presidential cycle in which voter turnout and the stakes are much higher.

"[The] 2016 [election] is going to be much different. It's a national election year [and] we know it's going to be challenging and expensive," Mr. Cox said. "We're constantly working to improve. We have the best grass-roots organization in the country and continue to build it out. Take the presidential race aside, our No. 1 priority is to protect our friends against attack, No. 2 is to defeat our opponents, and No. 3 is to go after open seat opportunities."

"Next year more of our friends will be under attack. It's going to be a challenging election cycle," Mr. Cox said. "We're going to face the most ruthless and dishonest but disciplined presidential campaign in Hillary Clinton. That's a reality that anyone who cares about freedom needs to focus on and be prepared."

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How the NRA made a difference in North Carolina

By Thom Tillis

As a freedom-lover and avid outdoorsman, I understand the importance of protecting the Second Amendment, which has been under attack by liberal special interest groups funded by elitist billionaires. The number-one defender of the Second Amendment rights is the National Rifle Association. The NRA works tirelessly to elect pro-Second Amendment candidates, and it fights fearlessly to win tough public policy battles and preserve those rights.

The NRA has earned its reputation as one of the most trusted, respected and reliable protectors of our constitutional freedoms. All elected officials — whether they're a city council member, state legislator or member of Congress — know that if they stand up for the Second Amendment, the NRA will stand up for them. And when it comes to shaping public policy, the NRA is one of the rare national advocacy organizations that actually says what it means, and then backs it up with results.

As the former state speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives, I helped push two landmark bills that protected and expanded gun rights for citizens. In 2011 we passed legislation that established the Castle Doctrine in North Carolina, which gave citizens the

legal right to use deadly force to defend themselves in their homes. We followed it up in 2013 by expanding concealed carry locations across the state and establishing much-needed privacy protections for concealed carry holders.

Those important bills would have never even seen the light of day without the sustained public support of the NRA, which also played a pivotal role in electing a majority in the North Carolina Legislature that was committed to expanding our Second Amendment rights.

The tremendous success of the NRA would not be possible without the support and dedication of its 4.5 million members across the nation. The NRA is a true grass-roots organization, and the collective power of its membership is simply unparalleled.

I know firsthand about the power of the NRA grass roots after receiving the NRA Political Victory Fund's endorsement in April 2014, which came at a critical time, just weeks before the hotly contested Republican Senate primary. From that moment on, countless North Carolinians approached me on the campaign trail to tell me that I had their votes for one simple reason: my proven record of advancing Second Amendment rights. The reason they knew about my record was because of the NRA's peerless

grass-roots mobilization, which quickly got the word out and ultimately helped tip the scales for my campaign.

The NRA-PVF's endorsement was instrumental in preventing a costly runoff election, which would have sapped valuable resources and severely damaged the prospects of defeating the Democratic incumbent in the general election.

Liberal groups, including one funded by Michael Bloomberg, began attacking me even before I was nominated. And by Election Day in November, they'd spent more in North Carolina against me than in any other state. My Democratic opponent had Bloomberg in her corner, but I had the advantage because I had the NRA behind me. Public records show the NRA spent \$4.4 million in North Carolina outlining the differences on the Second Amendment, and every penny mattered. The fliers in gun shops, the postcards to gun owners, the TV ads, the Internet ads — they all mattered.

Once I was sworn in as a senator, I quickly had the opportunity to again see the incredible influence of the NRA grass-roots members, this time in response to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms' attempt to ban the popular M855 hunting ammo. NRA members quickly mobilized a groundswell of public opposition to the ban. Phone lines in Washington

were ringing off the hook, and the NRA worked directly with congressional leaders to draft a letter to the ATF, calling on the agency to stop its unconstitutional gun restrictions. In the end, 80,000 comments were sent to the White House, and a majority of members of both the House and Senate signed letters to the ATF. The widespread public opposition caused the ATF to withdraw the proposed ban.

I, like millions of other Americans, am grateful for the tremendous effort and resources the NRA devotes to winning elections and its unwavering determination in stopping the attempts of unelected bureaucrats and out-of-the-mainstream liberal politicians to implement gun control laws that infringe upon the rights of law-abiding citizens. The question in Washington is never whether the NRA and its members will show up and stand for the Second Amendment, but rather whether our elected representatives will have the courage to back up their rhetoric with action in the pursuit of freedom.

It matters who wins elections because it matters who governs. Our nation is fortunate that NRA members vote like our freedom depends on it — because it does.

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Thom Tillis is a Republican serving as the junior U.S. Senator from North Carolina.

Cruz wants to let soldiers carry sidearms to protect against terror threats

By JACQUELINE KLIMAS

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

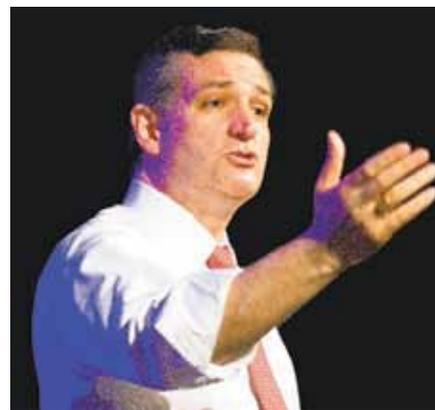
Sen. Ted Cruz is asking lawmakers to consider allowing troops to carry personal firearms on base for protection, reviving a fight that has previously been a nonstarter with Congress after military leaders said they didn't support the change.

While many lawmakers are open to having a discussion on changing the rules in the Senate Committee on Armed Services, most said that they would defer issues of base security to military leaders — who have historically been against allowing concealed carry on their posts.

Mr. Cruz formally sent a letter last month to Sen. John McCain, Arizona Republican and chairman of the committee, asking for a hearing on the subject, saying that current restrictions impede Second Amendment rights and weaken the safety and security of troops.

"The men and women in our military have been at war for over a decade; they understand the responsibilities that go along with carrying a firearm," Mr. Cruz wrote in the letter. "Yet their Second Amendment rights are removed at the front gate."

Mr. McCain said he has referred the issue



Republican presidential candidate Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, (AP Photo/David Goldman)

to the personnel subcommittee "to let them take action if they want to."

"I think we ought to have the hearing, but we need the input of the military. They're the ones who are directly affected by this, and I'm not making up my mind until I hear from the United States military," Mr. McCain told reporters Tuesday.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, the South Carolina Republican who chairs the personnel subcommittee, said he would try to get a hearing scheduled to let the military speak on how a rule change would affect their security.

Advocates of letting troops carry a weapon have said it could have prevented incidents like the 2009 shooting at Fort Hood, Texas, or the 2013 shooting at the Navy Yard in Washington if troops were armed and able to stop a gunman.

The Pentagon reiterated last April that it didn't support allowing troops to carry concealed weapons on military installations after a second shooting at Fort Hood, in which a gunman killed three people. Pentagon spokesman Col. Steve Warren said that the cost of training and certification requirements would be prohibitive.

"There are a lot of barriers to this idea, and the department's position — and we've spelled this out before — is that we do not support it," Col. Warren said last April.

A Defense Department spokesman said he didn't believe the department's position had changed since last year.

Sen. Thom Tillis, North Carolina Republican, said he too would defer to military leaders' viewpoints before making a decision on whether to support allowing service members to carry concealed guns on bases.

"I'm always open to good ideas on being able to expand concealed carry privileges," Mr. Tillis said. "The key though is to make sure the folks on the ground who

are responsible ultimately for the safety of soldiers and their families, that they're comfortable with it."

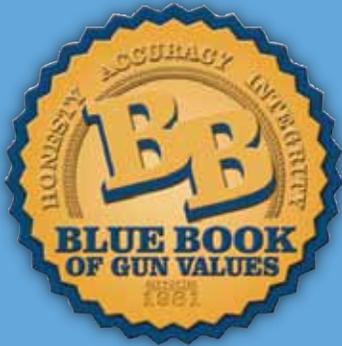
Mr. Tillis also noted that the Senate Armed Services Committee is beginning the lengthy process of considering and passing an annual defense policy bill in just a few weeks, meaning hearings on any other subject could get pushed down the road.

"It's also a matter of just time capacity and priority," he said.

Before 1993 each base commander determined what the carry rules would be at his base. But federal regulations put into effect that year block personnel who are not on security duty from carrying firearms. In the years following, even more regulations have been put in place. Following the shooting at Fort Hood, that installation now requires soldiers to register their weapons with commanders.

Commanders against concealed carry fear accidental discharges and fights between soldiers may escalate into serious violence.

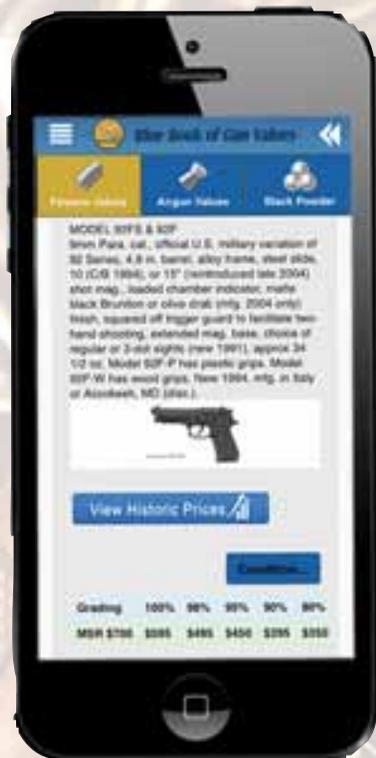
However, lawmakers raised the issue of troops carrying personal weapons on base as an amendment to last year's annual defense policy bill, but it failed to gain support in the GOP-controlled House.



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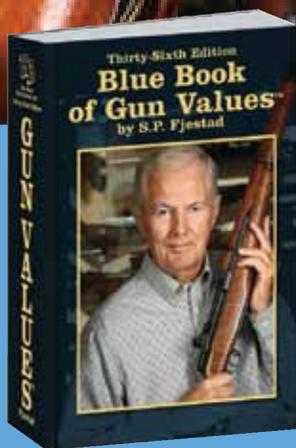


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How NRA altered the race for Gabby Gifford's old Arizona seat



Former U.S. Rep. Gabby Giffords

BY THE WASHINGTON TIMES

One of the most difficult 2014 congressional races, from the NRA's perspective, took place in Arizona, where former Rep. Gabrielle Gifford's one-time chief of staff was running for re-election. Ron Barber had been elected in 2012 after Gifford was

shot by a mentally unbalanced shooter in 2011. As she was recovering, Gifford emerged as a major public advocate for firearms restrictions.

The Republican candidate last fall, Martha McSally, a retired Air Force fighter pilot, had run against Barber in 2012 and took him on again last fall in what turned out to be the single closest congressional race in the country. The NRA got into the race after much internal debate, but did so cautiously because of the emotional impact of the Gifford shooting, the fact that Barber was so close to her and the sensitivities of voters to the firearms issue. Barber, however, was a gun control advocate, the district was seen by most as a swing district and NRA supporters in the district itself were lining up in favor of McSally who was, by all accounts, a formidable candidate.

The NRA's favorable ratings were strong in the district, but not as strong as they were in other contested races. Forty-seven percent of the district's voters turned out to be favorable to the NRA, but 40 percent had an unfavorable view of the organization. And former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who was disliked in most of the country, almost broke even in the district, with a 25 percent favorable to a 28 percent unfavorable rating. What was just as troubling was the fact that the

incumbent was fairly well regarded by district voters and throughout the campaign enjoyed a slightly better favorable rating than his challenger.

At first glance, the race seemed challenging at best for the NRA. But NRA-ILA Executive Director Chris Cox believed it was incumbent upon the association to do what it could for McSally. Before it was over, the NRA had managed to get some 46% of the district's voters to see, hear or read its message. And on Election Day, those who did gave McSally a five point margin. That may not seem like much, but in the end the race would be decided by about 200 votes and, as the exit polls clearly demonstrated, that margin was directly traceable to the NRA reaching voters favorable to its message. In fact, among the 47 percent of those who voted and had a favorable view of the NRA, McSally won 82% to 18%. Without that margin, she would not be in Congress today.

The outcome in the district was also affected by a last-minute, well-financed barrage of negative commercials attacking McSally and paid for indirectly by Michael Bloomberg. The ads were seen by voters and the local media as "over the top" and created a backlash against Barber that benefitted the NRA-ILA effort and hurt the candidate Bloomberg's forces were



Martha McSally

trying to help.

The fact that the NRA could have an impact in a district that had been recently torn apart by gun violence says a lot about the association's ability to reach its supporters under difficult circumstances as well as the flaws of its opposition.

NRA's Impact in the Suburbs: An Iowa Case Study

BY THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Given the lack of empirical data, the common wisdom among candidates, campaign managers and pundits is that while gun rights may be in an issue in Southern, Western and rural areas, candidates running in suburban districts should be leery of NRA support. The NRA's 2014 exit polling focused on just such a congressional district to see if the conventional wisdom is correct.

Turns out it's wrong.

Iowa's 3rd Congressional District is in many ways a quintessential suburban district. It is a Democrat-leaning swing district with more than three-quarters of its voters hailing from urban areas. Democrats had lost only one congressional race in the district since 1996 when then-Rep. Tom Latham, who had been moved into the district as a result of redistricting, won the seat narrowly in 2012. Latham carried the seat even as President Obama was winning it in 2012, and he decided to retire rather than run again last fall. This is just the sort of district in which many believe the NRA can do little to affect the outcome and may actually hurt the chances if it becomes heavily involved.

In spite of the common wisdom, the NRA did go into the district heavily and polled afterward to measure the impact of its efforts on the ultimate outcome, which resulted in the election of Republican David Young by 10 points. Young won the nomination after a brutal primary and convention fight with four other candidates, and he faced former state Sen. Staci Appel in the general election. She led in many polls right up to Election Day.

The NRA exit polls found that the NRA favorable image in the district stood at 53 percent positive to 36 negative, while even after the election Ms. Appel was viewed more positively by voters than the winner. When asked how they voted, however, those with a favorable view of the NRA voted 81 percent to 14 percent in favor of Mr. Young, giving him the winning margin overall.

Asked why they voted for Mr. Young, 65 percent of his voters told the pollsters they did so because he represented a "better choice" for the district than his opponent, but 31 percent said they voted for him "to show opposition to President Obama and Staci Appel's gun control agenda." Among voters who gave the

NRA a favorable rating, 66 percent said the NRA endorsement and support of Mr. Young made it more likely that they would vote for him, while only 8 percent said the NRA message pushed them the other way. These are telling numbers in a district like Mr. Young's because the common wisdom held that while the NRA involvement might motivate gun owners and Second Amendment supporters, it would turn off others and could hurt, rather than help, the candidate the NRA was endorsing.

That may have been the common wisdom, but the empirical evidence suggests it just isn't true.

In Iowa's 3rd District, as in Colorado and North Carolina, roughly half of the men and women who voted in the 2014 elections were inclined to view the NRA favorably and all voters expressed more "trust" in what the NRA said in its advertisement and commercials than in ads from other groups.

The only "outside" group close to the NRA in terms of credibility with voters was the Chamber of Commerce, and in most districts and states more people trusted what the NRA said in 2014 than

the Chamber.

In combination, the results of the exit polls released this week by the NRA tell a story that proves much of the common wisdom about the group and its influence is wrong. The NRA's message doesn't appeal simply to a small segment of the general electorate, but to fully half of those who go to the polls in urban, suburban and rural districts. And those favorable to the organization, trust and tend to act on its messages. In close races, the evidence underscores the accuracy of the anecdotal stories about the NRA's effectiveness at affecting the outcome.

What's more, the NRA message overcomes the clutter and clatter of campaign noise and reaches those it is intended to reach. People remember NRA ads, and those who agree are heavily influenced by them while other voters — who critics of the organization would argue might vote against the NRA-favored candidate — don't do so in any significant numbers. The NRA exit poll results released this week may well change the common wisdom of political consultants as we approach 2016.

Gun rights advocates fight to change Colorado's limits on ammunition magazines

By VALERIE RICHARDSON
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

DENVER | There is nothing that infuriates Colorado firearms owners more than the 15-round ammunition magazine limit enacted two years ago by Democrats, but a proposal to raise the limit to 30 rounds has split the state's gun rights movement.

The issue is whether it's better to neuter the 2013 law by doubling the legal limit, or hold out for nothing less than a full repeal. At the center of the rift is Dudley Brown, president of the National Association for Gun Rights, whose feuds over ideological purity have put him at odds with large swaths of the state and national movement.

The fireworks erupted this month when Democratic state Sen. Joe Salazar floated the idea of a 30-round limit. Mr. Salazar's support is pivotal because he serves as vice chairman of the House's "kill committee," where Republican-sponsored gun rights bills traditionally go to die.

Embracing the idea were Jon Caldara and David Kopel of the Independence Institute, a Denver free market think tank and Second Amendment advocacy group. They say a 30-round limit would solve 99 percent of the limit's problems, given that the most popular magazines for pistols and the AR-15 rifle can hold only 30 or fewer rounds anyway.

Mr. Brown, who also heads the Rocky Mountain Gun Owners, disagrees. He wants lawmakers to accept nothing short of the law's eradication, arguing that a 30-round limit would weaken momentum for a repeal and guarantee that the magazine law will be "permanent and unrepeatable."

The debate quickly went personal, with both sides invoking against the other the specter of gun control advocate and former New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg.

The Rocky Mountain Gun Owners accused the Independence Institute of being a Bloomberg "sleeper cell," and Mr. Caldara countered that "Dudley Brown and Michael Bloomberg are now working for the same goal — to keep standard-capacity magazines from Coloradans."

The Rocky Mountain Gun Owners group dubbed the 30-round proposal the "Kopel Kompromise" and slammed Mr. Kopel for being a registered Democrat.

Mr. Kopel calls the Rocky Mountain Gun Owners leader "a huckster and a hoax" who cares more about whipping his supporters into a frenzy to raise money than with enacting legislation to improve the situation of gun owners.

In another internecine battle over gun rights, Mr. Brown is attempting to derail the National Rifle Association's National Right to Carry Reciprocity legislation,

which would allow those with permits to carry concealed firearms in states that do not prohibit concealed carry.

Calling the bills a "Trojan horse," the National Association for Gun Rights says in a March letter that the bills are unnecessary because "the Second Amendment is the only permit law-abiding gun owners should need" and warns that the measures would lead to registration and confiscation.

Sen. Rand Paul, Kentucky Republican and presidential hopeful, was not invited to this month's NRA convention. The snub was based in part on the ties of Mr. Paul and his father to the National Association for Gun Rights, The Washington Times reported this month.

There is little love lost between Mr. Brown and some other gun rights advocates. The NRA referred to Mr. Brown in 2000 as the "Al Sharpton of the gun movement," and the Second Amendment Foundation said last year that his rhetoric "has done more to marginalize Second Amendment activism than all of the slanders from gun prohibition lobbying groups combined."

Nobody is benefiting from the Colorado firefight more than the state's Democrats.

"Dems dropped the 30-round distraction like a piece of red meat between two pit bulls who hate each other, Kopel and Dudley. Both dogs took the bait," one commenter told conservative talk show host Mandy Connell last week on KHOW-AM in Denver.

Mr. Brown points out that the debate is hypothetical, given that no such measure has been introduced. It clearly would take some legislative hustle to move a 30-round bill at this late date, although supporters insist there is still time for the Republican Senate leadership to introduce a bill and have it pass both houses before the May 6 adjournment.

Although advancing a 30-round bill would be difficult this year, those in favor argue that it's far more achievable than waiting for a full repeal. Democrats killed a repeal bill last week in committee, along with a half-dozen other Republican-sponsored gun measures. Even if a repeal does pass, Gov. John Hickenlooper, a Democrat, is unlikely to sign it.

"There are not the votes for the repeal and there are not the votes to pass a 31-round ban, either," Mr. Brown said on Ms. Connell's show. "Because principled conservatives will not vote for that. And left-wing Democrats won't vote for that either because they don't want to remove the ban on 30-round magazines."

Even so, a half-dozen callers to her show said they would rather see the limit doubled now than hold out for something that probably won't happen

unless Republicans take control of both legislative houses and the governorship.

"Reality's reality. We're not going to get a repeal. It's not going to happen," said a caller named John. "So I want my 30-round magazine back for my AR, I want my 17-round magazines back for my Ruger. That's a standard-capacity magazine. That's not a small thing."

Mr. Brown countered that gun owners can buy and own magazines that exceed the 15-round limit. Most of the state's county sheriffs oppose the 2013 law — they are represented by Mr. Kopel in a lawsuit challenging it — in large part because they say it's unenforceable.

"To those people who say, 'Wait a minute, I want to be able to buy my 30-round magazine,' I say, 'Shut your pie hole and go buy one.' There are many retailers who sell them right now. They ignore the law," Mr. Brown said. "And God bless them for doing so. And in many cases, your district attorney and your sheriff won't be involved in any cases against you, anyway."

Ms. Connell, a Second Amendment supporter, called his suggestion irresponsible. "I don't know why you would encourage a gun store to put their licensing at risk because you disagree with the law."

A caller named Steve who identified himself as a police officer said, "We're all required to obey the law, and I think that's bad advice."

"They took away our rights incrementally, we might have to get them back incrementally," he said. "I don't think the ban is right, but we should take the 30-round and keep going from there."

Denver political analyst Eric Sondermann said there may be more sympathy for raising the magazine limit among Democrats than most people realize.

The governor has waffled on the magazine bill. He offered an apology to county sheriffs for not meeting with them and blamed his decision in part on a staffer in a meeting recorded last year by Reveal-ing Politics.

"Everyone knew when the Democrats passed those gun bills back in 2013 — and whatever you made of them, and I supported most of them — that the weakness in that package of bills was the 15-round limit," Mr. Sondermann said on Colorado Public Television's "Colorado Inside Out."

"Gov. Hickenlooper acknowledged as much at the time, even though he signed it, and tried to backtrack with that awkward appearance before the sheriffs," he said. "Here, you have an opportunity to get that right."

The Rocky Mountain Gun Owners group bills itself as "Colorado's only no-compromise gun rights organization," and Mr. Brown pointed out that its PAC

spent heavily to elect Republicans last year, unlike the Independence Institute, which cannot back candidates, because it is registered under section 501(c)3 of the tax code.

"It's our organization and our PAC that spent the money to elect the legislature and take the Senate from the Democrats," Mr. Brown said on Ms. Connell's show. "We were the biggest funders of Republican candidates in last election. Far bigger than the NRA."

NRA spokeswoman Catherine Mortensen declined to comment on specifics of the Colorado squabble but said in a statement, "The NRA opposes arbitrary limitations on magazine rounds."

Mr. Kopel, who is recognized as a legal authority on the Second Amendment, argues that the Rocky Mountain Gun Owners group has little to show for its activism.

"Dudley and his group have been around in Colorado's lobbyists since the late '90s, and yet they have never passed a single bill," Mr. Kopel said on "Colorado Inside Out." "Dudley's schtick is to keep people upset and angry and giving him money, and never to solve any problem."

There is no doubt Mr. Brown has the political firepower to make Republicans' lives difficult if they support a 30-round bill. His group has backed Republican primary challengers. Even though his candidates don't always win, they can weaken Republican victors to the point where they are easily defeated by Democrats.

Ms. Connell suggested that the Rocky Mountain Gun Owners' political priorities are misplaced.

"I heard from many people that they were extremely powerful and that you can't go up against Rocky Mountain Gun Owners," said Ms. Connell. "Well, the way I saw it was, if they were so powerful, we wouldn't have a magazine limit right now in Colorado. We wouldn't have expanded background checks here in Colorado."

Among those frustrated with the gun rights movement's circular firing squad is state Rep. Chris Holbert, a Republican who said the events brought "unnecessary division among the pro-Second Amendment community in Colorado."

"There was no bill, nor was there an amendment to a bill, that could have changed the current 15-round magazine limit to 30 rounds," Mr. Holbert said in a statement on Facebook. "That choice never actually existed, yet many took sides for or against that question. It would be one thing to throw principle out the window and embrace such a choice if it actually existed. It's more disappointing that some chose to embrace such a change when the opportunity wasn't even in play."

The lesson of Cory Gardner's 2014 election victory

NRA campaign effort more effective than other outside groups, polling shows

By THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The 2014 Senate elections were among the most expensive in history because so much was at stake. The Republicans were fighting for control of the Senate, and the Democrats were doing everything they could to hold on to that control. The battle raged in more than 10 swing states.

The National Rifle Association was determined to elect as many friendly senators as possible, but was stopped from really going into states where Democrats who had voted with the NRA to defeat the Obama administration's post-Sandy Hook "reforms" were vulnerable to even friendlier Republicans. The NRA position had always been and remained that legislators who voted with them would not be abandoned even if facing a challenger who might arguably be even better on Second Amendment issues.

The final vote in the 2014 Senate battle over gun rights was on an amendment sponsored by West Virginia Democrat Joe Manchin and Pennsylvania Republican Pat Toomey that was defeated with the support of several Democratic senators running for re-election. These included senators from Alaska and Arkansas who later lost to Republican challengers in races in which the NRA could do little.

In other races, however, the organization went "all in." NRA's Chris Cox's strategists had found in the past that while the NRA could claim some 5 million formal members across the country, there are another 50 million voters who look to the organization for leadership on Second Amendment issues and who will often, if they perceive one of the candidates to be better than the others on these issues, cast their vote for the better candidate. In targeted states, therefore, the NRA focuses on identifying and reaching the 90 percent of potential Second Amendment-friendly voters who are not NRA members.

Colorado was at the center of the 2014 battle between gun owners and the Obama administration. A revolt occurred among Colorado voters in the aftermath of a successful effort by Gov. John Hickenlooper and the Democratic state legislature to force unwanted restrictions on gun ownership and sales in the state. As a result, two key Democratic legislative leaders lost recall elections and gun owners were as energized. Democratic Sen. Mark Udall was up and had been throughout his career a supporter of gun control measures such as those favored by President Obama. He was opposed by Republican Rep. Corey Gardner, and if the GOP had any hope of taking control of the Senate, Colorado was a "must win" race.

As a congressman who supported the Second Amendment, Mr. Gardner was assured of strong NRA backing.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

The NRA spent less than some of the so-called outside groups that supported Mr. Gardner. But when the smoke cleared, none could claim to have generated close to the number of votes moved by the NRA's effort. The postelection survey told the story in terms no one could refute.

As in other races, the first question the NRA pollster asked of voters leaving the polls was whether they support the "goal and objectives of the NRA." In Colorado, 51 percent of all voters answered that simple question in the affirmative and 55 percent of all voters said they "trust" the information they hear or see from the NRA. Those are remarkable numbers.

What's more, Colorado voters paid attention and remembered seeing NRA ads. In addition to the money spent by the candidates themselves, many "outside groups" on both the right and left urged support for the candidates running in Colorado. Mr. Gardner enjoyed the support and benefited from spending not just by the NRA, but from organizations like the Chamber of Commerce, GOP organizations like the National Republican Senatorial Committee and Karl Rove's American Crossroads. All of these groups helped Mr. Gardner, but some were more effective than others both because they were more trusted than others and because they delivered their message in a more targeted manner.

The exit poll data is telling. The NRA spent a little over \$2.1 million supporting

Mr. Gardner on television, radio and Internet advertising as well as on mail and telephone calls to Second Amendment-friendly voters. The voters who said they had seen NRA ads on television broke for Mr. Gardner over Mr. Udall by 57 percent to 40 percent, and of the 51 percent who said that they agreed with the values and goals of the NRA, 78 percent said seeing the ads made them more likely to vote for Mr. Gardner as opposed to only 8 percent who were turned off by them.

These are impactful numbers, especially when compared with the efforts of other groups supporting Mr. Gardner. American Crossroads, for example, spent slightly more than \$11 million running television ads in support of the GOP candidate. This was more than five times as much as the NRA spent, but only 38 percent of voters could remember seeing the ads and among those who did see them, Mr. Udall won over Mr. Gardner by a 54 percent to 44 percent margin.

The Chamber of Commerce and National Republican Senatorial Committee efforts yielded similar results. No ads were either as well received or remembered as those run by the NRA, and their impact on the final vote was traceable to the overall number of voters who share NRA's values and the overall trustworthiness of the NRA message.

Exit pollsters asked voters who remembered seeing the ads run by these groups whether they felt they could trust the information from them. By a margin

of 55 percent to 37 percent, voters said they could trust the NRA information while the Chamber was trusted by a slightly smaller 42 percent to 31 percent margin. The Republican Senatorial Committee (35 percent to 45 percent) and American Crossroads (21 percent to 32 percent) were actually distrusted by more voters than those who felt they could trust them.

The effectiveness of any such effort turns on whether voters who might have stayed home or voted for the candidate the NRA opposed actually responded by voting for Mr. Gardner. If they were going to do so anyway, the NRA spending, while helping a little, could be dismissed as nice but not determinative. The data suggests, however, that a significant number of voters cast their votes for Mr. Gardner because of the NRA message.

Exit pollsters asked Second Amendment-friendly Gardner voters if they cast their votes as they did because they thought overall that Mr. Gardner was a better candidate or choice than the incumbent or as a way of demonstrating their opposition "to President Obama and Mark Udall's gun control agenda."

While 55 percent said they voted for Mr. Gardner because he was a better candidate, 38 percent added they cast their votes to demonstrate their opposition to Mr. Obama's gun control agenda. That's about 20 percent of all of those who voted: an incredible indicator of one organization's impact.

U.S. gun manufacturing soars as Americans worry about security

Production spiked after Obama push for limits

By **STEPHEN DINAN**

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The American firearms industry is as healthy as ever, seeing an unprecedented surge that has sent production of guns soaring to more than 10.8 million manufactured in 2013 alone — double the total of just three years earlier.

The 2013 surge — the latest for which the government has figures — came in the first full year after the December 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, signaling that the push for stricter gun controls, strongly backed by President Obama, did little to chill the industry despite the passage of stricter laws in states such as New York, Maryland, Connecticut and California.

Indeed, interest in guns appears to be at an all-time high in California, which shattered its record for gun-purchase background checks last month, with nearly 200,000 processed, suggesting a vibrant firearms market in the country's largest state.

Industry backers say they aren't surprised firearms buyers and manufacturers alike have responded to the national gun control debate by making and purchasing more.

"The surge in firearms sales in 2013 reflects both a long-term upward trend in shooting sports participation and [a] particular concern that year that law-abiding gun owners and those interested in purchasing a firearm for the first time could face tougher restrictions affecting access to and selection of firearms," said Mike Bazinet, a spokesman for the National Shooting Sports Foundation.

Little more than two years after the Sandy Hook shooting, which claimed the lives of 20 schoolchildren and six faculty at the school, the staying power of the industry is striking.

Despite Mr. Obama's personal appeal for stricter laws, efforts to impose more background checks and to ban military-style rifles and high-capacity ammunition magazines failed at the federal level in 2013. The Democrat-led Senate blocked those changes in a filibuster, and the Republican-controlled House never even took up any legislation.

Mr. Obama was left to move ahead on his own, signing more than two dozen executive orders and memos tweaking federal enforcement priorities, urging safe gun ownership and boosting the focus on mental health. He also nominated B. Todd Jones to be director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives — but two years later, Mr. Jones has quit the agency after a bungled effort to ban a popular type of rifle ammunition.

Some states did move forward in the wake of Newtown, including Connecticut, where Sandy Hook was located. Colorado,



ASSOCIATED PRESS

A man fills out paperwork before selling a handgun to a first-time gun owner at Metro Shooting Supplies, in Bridgeton, Missouri. In 2000, 51 percent of Americans said guns made homes more dangerous, according to Gallup, the polling firm. By last year that had dropped to 30 percent, with a full 63 percent now saying guns made a home "safer."

Maryland, New York and California also enacted restrictions.

Still to be seen is what effect those tougher state laws will have on manufacturers. Several companies signaled they would flee states where they no longer felt welcome and shift production to states that are seen as more gun-friendly, but those moves came too late to be reflected in the 2013 data, which is the most recent available. ATF releases data after a one-year gap.

Beretta, which produced nearly 350,000 firearms at its Accokeek, Maryland, plant in 2013, said last year it is moving to Tennessee.

A spokeswoman for the company didn't return a call seeking comment.

Several gun control groups also didn't respond to messages seeking comment on the manufacturing statistics and what they mean for the state of the debate.

Surging under Obama

The biggest change in production has come under Mr. Obama. From 2001 to 2007, gun production held steady at between 3 million and 4 million units a year. It topped 4 million in 2008 but shot to 5.6 million in 2009, held steady in 2010 and then spiked to 8.6 million guns in 2012 and a record 10.8 million in 2013, according to ATF data.

John R. Lott Jr., president of the Crime Prevention Research Center, said Americans interested in owning firearms are reacting to the gun control debate by buying more of them. But he also said polling shows a fundamental shift in attitudes, with Americans increasingly believing that the right to bear arms must be protected and increasingly seeing guns as a way to make homes safer, rather than as a potential danger in and of themselves.

Indeed, in 2000, 51 percent of Americans said guns made homes more dangerous, according to Gallup, the polling firm. By last year, that had dropped to 30 percent, and a full 63 percent now said guns made a home "safer."

"My own personal belief is that change in the beliefs about guns and safety has served as the basis for why you see increasing opposition to gun control during that same period of time," Mr. Lott said.

Mr. Lott said firearm sales, even more than manufacturing statistics, are a measure of the health of the movement, and those are also on the rise, with adjusted background checks — a good proxy for sales — growing from 8.9 million a year in 2008 to nearly 15 million in 2013.

"That's a pretty hefty change you saw over that period of time," he said.

California's background checks hit

199,833 in March — 20 percent more than the previous monthly high and about twice as much as the average for March over the last decade.

The spike stumped California gun rights advocates.

"There's no big gun bills, there's no big scare," said Brandon Combs, who heads a number of California advocacy groups.

He said March and April are often big months for gun checks in his state, and he speculated it could be because residents are getting their tax returns, recovering from holiday spending and have cash to spend. But he said the spike could also be another reflection of California's growing embrace of guns.

One other measure of that affinity comes in the number of "concealed carry" permits, which Mr. Combs said have tripled over the last few years. At the end of 2014 there were about 70,000 people licensed in California, and officials said another 15,000 to 20,000 applications were pending at that time.

"California is working its way toward its first 100,000-license year ever," Mr. Combs said.

Nationally, concealed carry permits have grown from 4.6 million in 2007 to more than 12 million now, Mr. Lott said.

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