Master's thesis

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences
Department of Sociology and Political Science

Henrik Østensen Heldahl

'From My Cold, Dead Hands'

A Case Study of Republican Gun Policy From 1945 to 2018

Master's thesis in Political Science
Supervisor: Espen Moe
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Abstract

This thesis is a case study of Republican gun policy from 1945 to 2018. The early gun debate of the modern era came to life in the 1960s and culminated with the bipartisan passing of the Gun Control Act of 1968. I present a historical retelling of American gun policy and the five major gun bills signed into law on the federal level after World War II. I ask why the Republican party evolved on gun policy and test whether the gun lobby, polarization, or political reform is responsible for pushing the Republican party to the right on this issue.

I find polarization to be the most important factor in making the GOP more pro-gun. It created the underlying political environment that made it possible for the Republican party to move towards an uncompromising position on gun control. There was significant polarization in the U.S. Congress during this thesis' time period, and Republicans polarized most intensely in the House in the mid-1990s and in the early 2010s in the Senate. I present roll-call data on gun votes in the U.S. Senate from 1972 to 2013 that shows how the divergence between the two parties matches the other signs of polarization at the time.

I dismiss the public stereotypes about the National Rifle Association (NRA) and show why they are a rational actor who sets short- and long-term goals to shape gun policy. The NRA has grown to become a larger, more partisan organization with a more active member base than when it first started actively pursuing public policy goals in the 1970s. Its success has largely come from presenting lawmakers with a significant "legislative subsidy," and not from its political donations.

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Abbreviations

ATF	Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives
AWB	Assault Weapons Ban
Brady Bill	The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act
CMO	Congressional Member Organization
FFRA	Federal Firearms Reform Act of 1979
FOPA	Firearm Owners Protection Act
GCA	Gun Control Act of 1968
GOP	The Grand Old Party
NRA	National Rifle Association
NRA-ILA	National Rifle Association-Institute for Legislative Action
NRA-PVF	National Rifle Association-Political Victory Fund
PAC	Political Action Committee
PLCAA	Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act

Acknowledgements

My fascination with American conservatism began when I moved to rural Washington state as a High School exchange student in 2009. The tiny town of Bickleton was held together by a social fabric consisting almost entirely of religion, conservativism, and the warming sense of community that epitomizes the rural farmlands of the Pacific Northwest. The culture clash of my arrival on Main Street America was only heightened by the political tensions of the first years of Barack Obama's presidency – but I was nothing but a willing participant in the turmoil of political debate. I met every discussion with the enthusiasm of Theodore Roosevelt's *Man in the Arena* and came out better for it.

I would have never written this thesis if not for the hospitality and generosity of my host parents – first Barbara and Jerry, then Dave and Debbie. My interests at this critical point in life were nourished further by a few incredible teachers – Darrell Lang and Silvia Navarre of Bickleton HS and Camilla Hoff Lambine of Bodø VGS.

Since then, I have been able to develop my passion for U.S. politics through my writing and podcasting at AmerikanskPolitikk.no. The trust afforded to me by editor Are Tågvold Flaten has propelled me into the media commentariat, and I would not be where I am today without having been offer this opportunity.

I hold the largest share of appreciation for the guidance of my supervisor, Espen Moe. Espen's ability to understand how to formulate tasks to fit my study habits during the writing process was of great help. As was his understanding of U.S. politics. Espen's willingness to answer emails late at night and hold meetings at my times of need was crucial to my progress.

I have kept my sanity throughout this strenuous process with help of my girlfriend, Kari-Anne. Without her clarity of thought, I would not have made a pivotal course correction early on. This thesis would not exist in its current form without her.

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Henrik Østensen Heldahl

Trondheim, Norway

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A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed

(U.S. Constitution, Amendment II).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Gun policy is a controversial topic in American politics, and one that has been elevated to near wedge-like status after several high-profile mass shootings. Following the Sandy Hook and Aurora shootings in 2012, and the subsequent failure of attempted policy reform, the issue has stayed in the public eye. Voters describing gun control as 'very important' to their vote grew from 45 to 72 percent from the 2012 to the 2016 election (Pew Research Center 2012, 2016). A 2015 poll found the National Rifle Association (NRA) and Planned Parenthood to be the two most popular and unpopular political entities in the U.S., showing a split between voters with both getting most of their support from supporters of different parties (Bump 2015).

Mass shootings followed by public outcries for changing current gun laws and a lack of political will to achieve those goals has become a familiar cycle of events in the U.S. The failure to alter federal gun laws in the wake of tragedy has resulted in a search for answers as to why this is and for villains to blame. Active shooter incidents per year more than doubled from 2007-2013, compared to the seven years prior (FBI 2014). Public frustration culminated in the *March on Washington* on 24 March 2018, when over a million people across the U.S. marched for tougher gun laws.

At the eye of the storm of public debate sits the NRA, a six million-member gun rights organization involved in lobbying and elections. However, the NRA is not well-studied in academia, in part due to the secrecy of the organization. There is a public consensus on the American left that the NRA has had a significant effect on gun policy in the U.S. by making lawmakers afraid to challenge them. Critics of current laws have directed the spotlight at a perceived lack of compromise on the side of the Republican party (otherwise known as the *Grand Old Party*, or GOP), claiming that the NRA is anywhere from partly responsible for their behavior to some sort of puppet master (Orr 2018).

I will demonstrate in this case study that gun policy could not have become a highly divisive and controversial issue if not for the polarization of American politics, and that the NRA took advantage of this development to advance a 'pro-gun' agenda.[1] The timeframe covered is 1945 to 2018, divided into four eras. I start in 1945, as the end of World War II represents a natural cut-off point. The second era starts in 1968 – the year of the first federal gun law since the 1930s. The third and fourth eras begin with the first term of Bill Clinton in 1993 and the second term of George W. Bush in 2005.

While gun culture in America is ever-present, with roots as deep as the nation itself, the role of gun policy has changed tremendously in the last 100 years. Before the gangster era of the 1920s and 30s it was non-existent as a policy concern and has moved in and out of relevance since. The issue of

[1] 'Pro-gun' is a catch-all term for supporting or advancing gun rights.

guns as public policy did not have the divisive quality it now has until the 1990s.The two parties have seemingly grown apart on this front, without there being a consensus in the literature as to why.

There is an urban/rural divide in the politics of guns that I will also shed light on. Guns have been a part of American life since colonial times, and the era of westward expansion brought with it a cultural mystique that incorporated gun culture in the Wild West. This cultural divide still exists, and I believe the value differences in urban and rural American life is of relevance to the gun debate.

'Protecting gun rights,' political speak for keeping gun laws liberal, has become an almost evangelical stance in the Republican party, comparable to lowering taxes and opposing abortion. At the 2000 NRA convention, NRA President Charlton Heston famously lifted a rifle over his head and proclaimed to the "divisive forces that would take freedom away […] from my cold, dead hands!" Although it has a pro-gun, conservative wing, the party Democratic party has grown tougher on guns over time. Such a liberal wing of the GOP does not currently exist in any meaningful way nationally. A purpose of this thesis is to explain the development in the Republican party across the outlined time-period.

There is plenty of existing literature on guns in an historical context, and their role in America. The same can be said for how parties operate, and the impact of lobbying. The limitation of these studies is that they provide only very specific information on very specific time periods, making it difficult to understand how the issue at hand has developed over a longer period of time, and how the Republican party developed their views on guns. This provides a window of opportunity for this thesis to study something new, and to fill a gap in the literature. The research question is as follows:

What led the Republican party to go from moderate to uncompromising on gun control?

The purpose of this thesis is to answer the research question in a thorough manner. To achieve this goal, I will examine the role of interest groups in affecting lawmakers, and whether this can explain the development I observe. I will also be looking at a slew of other underlying factors. These include how the GOP was or wasn't affected by the make-up of the party, changes to how it selects its Presidential candidate, how national and local polarization has affected gun policy, and examining the urban/rural divide. I am interested in finding out if the Republican party changed its approach over time, and whether this happened for a specific reason – or several specific reasons – or if it was the unintended consequence of concurrent events.

How responsible the NRA is to the GOP's gun development is not well-studied in the literature. What I will show is that while the NRA is an influential actor, their success in molding Republican gun policy has been beholden to the overarching development of polarization. Polarization has created an ideological divergence between the two parties, making gun control more controversial, and giving the NRA an opportunity to tailor a message of pro-gun activism to a listening audience in the GOP.

Chapter 2: Theory and Literature

Lobbying

The Make-Up of Interest Groups

One of the ways in which power is exerted in political institutions is through the lobbying of the members and parties in power. This is mostly done by interest groups, where people have formed groups to represent their interests on a specific topic. The goal of interest groups is influencing political decisions in a manner that is favorable to their goals (Kenny et.al. 2004, p. 332).

Influencing actors – or "intense policy demanders" – are characterized as being driven by a set of demands, being politically active in advancing these demands, and numerous enough to be heard (Cohen et.al. 2008, p. 30). There will often be two or more opposing coalitions or groups lobbying an issue at any given time (Ibid).

Although there is overlap, the two parties in the United States are aligned with quite different interest groups. Senators from the same state and party are often very similar in ideology, while senators from the same state and different party are quite dissimilar. This shows that the two parties have different support systems and are catering to different interest groups (Poole and Rosenthal 1984, p. 1061). Which groups are lobbying which side can be demonstrated by illuminating which parties different industries tend to support financially. Academia, print media, online computer services, and the entertainment industry tend to donate to Democrats, while construction, agriculture, and fossil fuel industries tend to donate to Republicans. Law firms, pharmaceuticals, real estate, and finance donate to both, with the two former skewing left the two latter skewing right (Bonica 2014).

The relevance of the interest group comes from the members it represents. These are the people or organizations the groups lobby on behalf of, and it is more powerful if they have a large member base and can communicate well with members (Kenny et.al. 2004, p. 333). It is advantageous for interest groups to have policy goals that reflect the majority opinion of members, and that the communication is "clear, concise and unambiguous" – making it easier to mobilize members in a meaningful way (Ibid).

Mobilizing members can be done by communicating desired election outcomes to persuade members to act according to the will of the leaders, by voting for their endorsed candidates, or even by getting involved in a political campaign or calling their representatives to make their voices heard

(Ibid). Such endorsements have had positive effects on the electoral success of House Republicans (Ibid, p. 342).

Lobbying Lawmakers

According to Moe (2005) a large part of the domestic power wielded by government lies in the bureaucracy, which constitutes a big part of the government, and is designed to make decisions and exercise them (p. 218). He argues against the rational cooperative view of democratic institutions, which views these institutions as "structures of voluntary cooperation that resolve collective action problems and benefit all concerned," and instead purports that after competing for power, the winner uses this power to gain control over which policy is enacted (Ibid, p. 215-6). The losing side is required by law to accept the winners' decisions (Ibid, p. 218). A large part of this power lies in having control over the bureaucracy, meaning that government decisions are less about cooperation, and more about legitimate control of power.

A simplistic view of lobbying makes it seem like interest groups simply buy votes from elected officials, paid for with re-election funds – but it has proven difficult to correlate lobbying efforts with the electoral activities of parties (Key 1952, p. 128-9). Lawmakers don't work in a vacuum. They have constituents to listen to and organizations to consult. To push certain agendas, interest groups attempt to tip the scales of power by lobbying lawmakers (Hall and Wayman 1990). Early literature on lobbying (late 1960s to early '90s) saw lobby groups as outside actors attempting to affect the behavior of neutral actors (Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015, p. 203). This has changed over time, and a more realistic school of thought has emerged. This realist school doesn't assume this level of neutrality on the part of members of Congress, and it sees the interactions between lobbyists and lawmakers as more complex than just money for votes. One school sees lobbying as an exchange, while the realistic school sees it as a form of persuasion (Hall and Deardorff 2006, p. 69).

To reflect the complexity of lobbying I will be employing a more dynamic understanding of the relationship between intense policy demanders and elected officials. That understanding is the realist school.

Lobbyists as Rational Actors

Hall and Wayman (1990) have found that "moneyed interests" are able to mobilize lawmakers that are predisposed to being sympathetic to the view of the interest group. At the same time, money

spent on opponents of one's position has a negative effect on their participation on the issue. Money, in this sense, doesn't buy votes, but it does buy the "marginal time, energy, and legislative resources that committee participation requires" (p. 814).

Hall and Deardorff (2006) build on this by proposing a theory of lobbying that understands the practice as a form of legislative subsidy. The subsidy involves "costly policy information, political intelligence, and labor to the enterprises of strategically selected legislators" (p. 69). Ergo, lobbyists are not attempting to change the minds of legislators, but instead want to aid natural allies in achieving a joint policy goal (Ibid).

By offering this "subsidy" to lawmakers, interest groups hope to court officials with enough clout to generate momentum for their policy goal. DeGregorio (1997) says that outside advocates require the help of these insider leaders to push their cause to the forefront of the legislative agenda. The idea is that these leaders bring along rank-and-file members in a bandwagon effect, creating more momentum for the cause. Lobbyist's therefore do not target lawmakers for their votes (and they don't target all the members of Congress needed to achieve their goal) – they target a few insiders who can use their networks to accumulate support. This was shown by Baumgartner and colleagues (2009, p. 208), who in their extensive study of the success and failure of lobbying efforts found that the side with the support of more high-level government officials achieved success 78 percent of the time. By contrast, having more Political Action Committee (PAC) contributions only yielded success 50 percent of the time (Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015, p. 203).[2]

Viewing lobbying through this realist filter is a way to interpret both interest groups and lawmakers as rational actors. Lawmakers are more likely to invest resources where they can predict success and will thus join in to support a cause where powerful actors are already mobilizing in its favor (Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015, p. 202). They will use the incentives interest groups give them in return for their support. Such incentives include information, staff time, research, a membership base that can be used to mobilize public support that often goes beyond that of the individual lawmaker. This is valuable to lawmakers, since they have finite resources, staff, and time – making it easier for said lawmaker to take on a leadership role on a certain issue if he/she gets a "legislative subsidy" from an interest group (Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015, p. 203, Hall and Deardorff 2006).

[2] A Political Action Committee is an organization that groups campaign contributions and makes donations to political campaigns (Janda et.al. 2008, p. 309).

Government officials are expected to be more inclined to support issues where mass mobilization is occurring, and less inclined to involve themselves in issues that have high levels of partisanship and media attention, since partisanship often leads to negative media coverage (Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015, p. 205).

At the same time, lobbying groups also work in a realist fashion. While scholars have tended to focus on single groups, it is more advantageous to see them as working together. Mahoney and Baumgartner (2015) liken them to wolves, who are more successful in packs (p. 214). As previously mentioned, there is a bandwagon effect in Congress. As with lawmakers, this also occurs with lobbyists. At any given time, only a small number of issues generate the attention of hundreds or thousands of lobbyists, while the vast majority of issues only get the attention of a few lobbyists (Mahoney and Baumgartner 2015, p. 204-5). This is because lawmakers care less about the position of individual lobbying groups than they do the overall "issue context" and lay of the land (Ibid). "No matter the level of PAC contributions, lobbying expenditures, or purported mobilizational clout of any individual interest group, government officials will not become leaders on issues based on the pleas of individual lobbyists" (Ibid, p. 205).

The Institute for Legislative Action

The lobbying operations of the NRA are handled by the Institute for Legislative Action (NRA-ILA). Any good interest group needs to show members of Congress their strength in numbers and members that are unified around specific policy goals. The NRA persuades its members to act in accordance with leadership's desires partly through its ratings system. In 1994 and beyond, the NRA published state-by-state endorsements and ratings of individual candidates and endorsements of races in the October issues of their magazines *The American Rifleman* and *The American Hunter* (McBurnett and Bordua 2004, p. 335). These endorsements ranged from U.S. Senate races to U.S. House races and all the way down to state House races. 1994 was the first time the NRA adopted this method (Ibid). The information used to rate and endorse are based on both past voting records on gun laws and Second Amendment interpretation as well as questionnaires sent to each candidate (Ibid). Ratings range from A+ ('An incumbent pro-Second amendment leader') to F- ('Favors extremely restrictive legislation and/or actively leads anti-gun efforts') (Ibid).

The NRA’s widely attributed power on Capitol Hill combined with the influence of interest groups in U.S. politics makes them a relevant actor to observe in this thesis. Lawmakers have become

dependent on lobbyists to achieve their policy goals, and the NRA a powerful group. This has led me to make them the focus of my first hypothesis (H1): *An increased influence of the National Rifle Association caused the Republican Party to adopt more extreme gun policy.*

Polarization

A polarized political climate causes dysfunction when the actors involved move far enough away from each other on ideology and policy goals that it becomes next to impossible to cooperate (Rosenfeld 2017). Polarization is widely acknowledged as a cause of increased partisanship that has caused gridlock and dysfunction in the United States capital (Rosenfeld 2017).

Polarization of Political Parties

The classical theory on two-party electoral competition is the Hotelling-Downs model (Hotelling 1929, Downs 1957). In it, the competing actors converge in the middle to secure the crucial median voter. They both see politics through an economic lens of rational voters in an ideological marketplace. Hotelling (1929) argues that voters are distributed linearly from left to right, each with a "bliss point" of ideal ideological preference ("single-peaked preferences"). When there are two candidates on the market, they will both converge in the middle to secure as many centrist voters as possible in addition to all voters on the side they represent (who have no other candidate to vote for except the competitor on the other side).

Downs' Rational Choice Theory (1957) is an economic theory that added to Hotelling by explaining how political parties converge in the middle – where most voters exist – in an effort to win elections. For this reason, Rational Choice theory purports cooperation to be an important goal for politicians, since this is valued by centrist voters, and that parties adapt their platforms to resemble one another while also making them purposely vague (Downs 1957).

The Hotelling-Downs theory evolved into the standard view of political behavior and stayed in that position for decades, making stable political parties in cooperative institutions the default understanding of the American system. Hotelling interprets voters through the lens of ideology while Downs does so via an economic model. Hotelling-Downs rests on the institutional bedrocks of

checks-and-balances and the malaise of the American political system that the Founding Fathers set up – one that requires consensus-building and compromise to work.

There is no modern-day consensus on Hotelling-Downs, and scholars differ on how to interpret two-party politics. As the field of study has grown, new theories have challenged the old. However, the assumption that parties are rational actors, as posited in Hotelling-Downs, still dominates the literature. Cox and McCubbins (1993) found legislators facing pressure to behave in accordance with the wishes of their district, as well as pressure to behave in accordance with the wishes of their party leadership. These two influencing factors can often come in conflict with each other – turning legislating into a balancing act. The political leadership in the United States is often most interested in implementing policy that is far from moderate (Ibid). This can cause a conflict between leadership and lawmakers from moderate districts, since they tend to legislate moderately. Lawmakers from districts where the electorate leans heavily in their favor have a smaller incentive to compromise, as their constituents will favor compromise less than those in moderate or swing districts (Ibid).

Leadership often wields power that punishes dissenting legislators, making it easier to resolve the conflict of interest (Ibid). Punishment can come in the form of committee assignments, which in the House of Representatives are highly influenced by the wishes of party leaders (Cox and McCubbins 2005, p. 17). Campaign funding can also be used (Jones 2010). Rewarding loyal members with election funds can serve as a carrot, while withholding funds – or even funding a primary opponent – can be used as a stick.

Cohesive Parties Causing Polarization

The literature assumes there has been congressional polarization, and thus I will allow for the conclusions of these assumptions to be drawn. However, in case this is a myth I will be attempting to prove/disprove this in the empirical portion of this thesis.

A possible explanation for congressional polarization is how parties have grown apart and become both cohesive and distinct from one another. This development is a result of how checks and balances limit how parties can operate. In a parliamentary system party cohesion is essential to legislative success for the majority, while the relationship is more complicated in a republic with a two-party system, like the U.S. There is often a greater reliance on the minority party in the U.S. because the President's party may not always command a majority in both houses of Congress.

Representatives are also more independent in the U.S. than in many other parliamentary systems (Sinclair 2003, p. 41).

Jones (2010) posited that if a majority party grows to be both internally cohesive and distinct from the main competing party, then the public will associate their performance with the performance of the institution (p. 325). He found this to have been true in elections between 1954 and 2006, where the congressional majority received a higher vote share when the public were more approving of Congress as a whole, and a lower vote share when the public was less approving (Ibid, p. 328). The majority party vote increases .441 points for each one-point jump in Congressional approval and drops .110 for members of the minority party (Ibid).

These findings also suggest that since re-election is the main goal of legislators, the electoral faith of individual members is increasingly tied to the performance of Congress as the majority party becomes more unified in its opposition to the minority. Therefore, members are incentivized to bolster the chances of leadership's success – partly by avoiding dissent – so they can turn around and sell the legislative successes of their majority to members of their district. If policies are not the main goal, lawmakers are still rewarded for accomplishing them, even if it means increasing polarization (Ibid, p. 334).

If Jones' (2010) theory holds, then the majority party can be stuck in a positive loop where they unify their majority, create polarization, then score legislative wins which will reelect their majority. The negative spiral would have identical first steps (unified majority, polarization), but legislative failures would increase their chances of losing the majority, giving the former minority a chance to attempt their own positive loop. It isn't necessarily this easy. For the theory to work, legislative successes would have to bolster public opinion of Congress, meaning that the majority needs to listen to the needs of the public (p. 334).

The result of this process is a majority party that ends up talking up Congress and the work being done there, while the minority will be more likely to criticize Congress as not working. This also gives the minority party an incentive to hinder the work being done in Congress, so they can convincingly sell Congress as dysfunctional to voters. As Jones puts it, "in practice, it appears that partisan polarization entails a trade-off. With polarization we get greater institutional accountability, but we also get more institutional acrimony. Without polarization, accountability is diffused, but cooperation and collegiality are more likely" (p. 336).

Congressional approval has been very low in recent years, topping 25 percent in only one of the monthly Gallup polls from 2010 – 2018 (Gallup 2019). These circumstances would make it more difficult to achieve a positive loop than in decades past.

Increasing Polarization in the late 20th Century

Sinclair (2003) found polarization to have increased considerably during the second half of the 20th century. During the 1960s and '70s, 40 percent of votes in the House and 42 in the Senate were along party lines. These numbers had grown to 58 and 57 percent during roll-call votes in the '90s (p. 46).

The President's legislative agenda is much more likely to succeed if it matches congressional preferences (Sinclair 2003, p. 46). Checks and balances ensure that having a majority in both chambers of Congress is the path of least resistance to legislative success. Without it, cooperation across party lines is the only remaining option, as was the intent of the Founders (Ibid). Sinclair (2003) confirms that the ability to find common ground has varied over time. He found that in periods of high polarization the Presidents that faced opposition control of Congress won only 16 percent of major votes on the House floor, while suffering "clear losses" in 62 percent of cases. In periods of low polarization, the numbers were reversed, with President's winning clearly 45 percent of the time and losing 37 percent. In periods of mixed congressional control, Presidents were more likely to win on big issues in the early period (of low polarization) by a margin of almost 2-1.[3]

Polarization of the Electorate

The information provided by Sinclair simply proves the existence of institutional polarization and that it's a fluctuating phenomenon. Within the literature there is a consensus that political parties became more cohesive in the second half of the 20th century, thus contributing to polarization of the U.S. Congress. The logical follow-up question is whether the populace has contributed to this, and if there's been a change in the electorate. I will now review my literature findings on this topic.

[3] " When control is divided, presidents clearly won on final disposition on 30 percent of major bills enacted in the earlier period and 17 percent in the latter period" (Sinclair 2003, p. 52).

Cleavages: Regional and Urban/Rural Divides

Voter preferences and ideological leanings can vary distinctly between regions. Regional shifts can have profound impact on parties and their agendas. One need not look any further than the American South to observe one of the most notable changes in regional power dynamics. The region had been solidly in Democratic hands from the 19th century through the first half of the 20th century, only interrupted by brief Republican control during Reconstruction after the Civil War (Hoogenboom 1988). Lyndon B. Johnson (President, 1963 – 1969) led the effort that got the Civil Rights Act of 1964 through Congress shortly after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and then made the oft-quoted claim that the Democratic party had lost the South for a generation as a result (Moyers 2004, p. 167). He would be proven right. When he made his prediction, the Democrats held roughly 90 percent of Southern districts in Congress – a majority that would fade to 70 percent in the 1980s and be lost during the 90s (Roberts and Smith 2003, p. 306).

This shift in party preference by Southern voters did not represent much of an ideological shift, as they had been conservative when voting for Democrats and remained so when they started electing Republicans. It did, however, alter the make-up of the Democratic party, as losing their Southern grip meant losing most of their conservative wing, which made the party more liberal on average. I will investigate this development later to find out if Republican gun policy could have changed as a result of changes in the party preferences of Southern voters.

Another dynamic at play with Southern voters is the rurality of the American South. Rural American conservatism is tied to a rural culture that stretches back to the era of westward expansion, where Scotch-Irish immigrants helped spread what Mead (2009) describes as Jacksonianism – that includes gun culture – through the country (225, 227).

Other Factors to Polarization

Kirkland (2014) found the blame for "polarized [and] highly cohesive" legislative parties (which cause dysfunction) to lie mostly at the hands of the people they represent (p. 543). Elected officials are forced to respond to their constituents, and when these constituents are ideologically heterogenous they cause polarized parties (Ibid). Individual states are sometimes highly homogeneous, causing ideologically pure, but extreme politicians to emerge. This increases party cohesion, making the national political landscape more polarized. Legislators from moderate districts behave differently, as

they are more likely to hold moderate positions that dissent from their leadership's agenda during roll-call votes.

Issues facing the nation – and the Congress – may alter voting alignments within parties and help explain how voters and districts can change over time. Concurrent events changing the legislative landscape or altering the congressional agendas (partly out of the control of politicians themselves) have the potential to upend longstanding party differences (Roberts and Smith 2003, p. 306). Roberts and Smith (2003) have demonstrated that during the two parties' most rapid-growing periods of party unity (1983-'88 for Democrats and 1991-'96 for Republicans), new members have shown greater party cohesion than continuing members (p. 313). This could be a symptom of a changing and perhaps more polarized electorate where new members are less likely to defect from the party line. However, continuing members also grew more cohesive (just not as much) during the same periods, and they therefore account for a majority of the increase in behavioral changes in voting, as there are many more continuing than new members at any given time (Ibid).

While the literature is not clear, it is quite possible that Democratic districts have grown more liberal and Republican districts more conservative, which has caused legislators to move accordingly, and old lawmakers to slowly be replaced (through re-election losses and retirements) by more extreme successors. Jacobson (2000) argues for the opposite causality, meaning that candidates have taken more extreme policy positions, which has led the electorate to hold more polarized policy positions.

The Tea Party as a Symptom of Polarization

It is not uncommon for parties to encompass sub-groups, or caucuses. Conservative Democrats have their *Blue Dog Coalition* and progressives the *Congressional Progressive Caucus* (Vikingstad 2018). The notable example of the right is the *Tea Party*, which has caused a polarization fueled rift in the Republican party. Caucuses operate outside the structures of parties, holding their own meetings and setting their own agendas. A potential consequence of polarization is that sub-groups with fringe agendas can emerge and grow. The Tea Party is an example of this.

Leading into the mid-term elections of 2010 the *Tea Party* was formed as a faction of the Republican party that played a big role when the GOP won back control of the House that year. Their focus on limiting government spending, reducing the debt, and social-conservatism made them a force to be reckoned with within the GOP. Facing a Tea Party member in an intra-party primary became a legitimate fear for Republican incumbents (Williamson et.al. 2011, p. 35-36). Their presence in the

Republican majority in the House (from the 112th through the 115th Congresses)[4] made it difficult for the GOP to pass bills through party-line votes. The Tea Party caucus had greater number than the margin of the GOP majority and their claim to ideological purity made cooperating with the Democratic party a non-starter (Ibid).

The Tea Party also serves an institutional role by having a formal group structure known as the *Tea Party Caucus* (In the 115th Congress they became known as the *Freedom Caucus*). In this caucus, which is a Congressional Members Organization (CMO), they engage in party-like behavior such as holding meetings, setting an agenda, strategizing and exchanging information on legislative affairs (Ragusa and Gaspar 2016, p. 363). The Tea Party operates as a party within the party (Ibid).

The formation of the Tea Party could not have happened if not for the long-term "partisan-ideological polarization" within the electorate in the prior decades and the growing activist base of the GOP (Abramovitz 2012, p. 197). According to Ragusa and Gaspar (2016) the Tea Party caucus experiences a polarizing effect by coordinating policy and setting a common agenda for members. There is also a socializing effect that comes with CMO memberships. This effect can strengthen caucus cohesion and cause members to grow further entangled both socially and politically (Ibid, p. 368-9). Leaders of the Tea Party (or Freedom Caucus) don't have the same quality inducements available to them when convincing members to vote a certain way, but this effect could still be strong for the Tea Party members compared to other CMO's because of their reputation as 'ideological purists' (Ibid).

Being a Tea Party member in Congress gives voters a useful 'cue' to where the legislator stands on issues, as a policy-making incentive for members to work collectively (Ibid, p. 363-4). Being a member is also a reliable predictor of voting behavior, with Tea party legislators being demonstrably less likely to support President Obamas policies (Ibid, p. 362). There was a rightward shift in voting behavior by members of Congress who joined the *Tea Party Caucus* and/or had a large volume of Tea Party activists in their congressional district, and these lawmakers have not 'bounced back' closer to the middle later, as members who take on extreme voting records have tended to do (Ibid, p. 362, 365).

[4] 2011 – 2019.

Redistricting

The hypothesis that redistricting has been a driving factor of polarization is regarded as conventional wisdom by many in the media (Wasserman 2016). Media articles have argued that gerrymandering is partly to blame for the polarization of the major parties, marginalizing ethnical minorities, making elections less competitive, and even rigging elections in favor of one party (Lieb 2017, Soffen 2016, Ingraham 2016). Therefore, I will take a closer look at the effect of gerrymandering on polarization, and potentially on gun policy.

Gerrymandering is a term born out of redistricting, which is the process of drawing electoral districts – be it for the U.S. House or any form of state legislature. For the House, this happens after the decennial census mandated by the U.S. Constitution, which allows for the reapportionment of districts by state (Wasserman 2016). After all districts in the nation have been reapportioned, the state legislatures will typically draw the districts.

The term *gerrymandering* refers to districts being redrawn using computer modelling with the aim of maximizing the result for one's own party by *packing* the other party's voters into a few districts, leaving one's own party with smaller (but still safe) majorities in most districts (Abramowitz et.al. 2006, p. 76). It can also be done by *cracking* the other party's voters into several districts with partisan leans that make them just out of reach.

Abramovitz et.al. (2006) found redistricting to have had a negligible effect on House races in the restricting cycles of 1982, 1992, and 2002 (p. 79). Regardless of who drew the district (one-party legislature, divided legislature, or nonpartial/judicial committee) the changes in district lines did not affect the proportions of electorally safe or competitive districts (Ibid). I will be assessing redistricting more closely in the empirical chapter.

Self-Sorting

The literature up to this point seems clear in its assertion that polarization has occurred. The debate is mostly focused on how it happened, and what the consequences are. The term *self-sorting* has become a part of the vocabulary of those concerned with how polarization happens. The literature on this subject relies on the assumption that internal migration within the United States can have an electoral effect (therefore it might also influence gun policy). This assumption is reasonable given the country's geographic and ethnic diversity, combined with the realities of first-past-the-post electoral districts (McDonald 2011, p. 513). The plausibility of this hypothesis is heightened by Americans'

easy-going attitude towards moving (Ibid). It should go without saying that migration can both increase or decrease the political homogeneity of a congressional district or a state.

The *partisan polarization hypothesis* asserts that changes occur within the electorate itself, and not from the outside (Oppenheimer 2005). This stems from population movement and immigration, ideological realignments, and *self-sorting* – the idea that Democrats move into cities and surround themselves with other Democrats, while Republicans mostly surround themselves with other Republicans.

Bishop (2009) explains *self-sorting* as a process of internal migration that has occurred over several decades. Liberals have moved next to other liberals, and into liberal neighborhoods; Conservatives have moved next to other conservatives. Over time this has polarized the electorate. Bishop demonstrated this using county level data from presidential elections. He presented a series of maps demonstrating that not only is past presidential voting history a reliable indicator of which candidate a county will go for in later presidential elections, counties increased their support for one party over time. Becoming more solidly Democratic or Republican counties.

Certain patterns are clear when it comes to internal migration. According to Cho, Gimpel, and Hui (2013) Democratic voters generally prefer urban and densely populated areas more than Republicans (p. 861-2). Republicans, on the other hand, are more likely to move out of urban areas than in. Voters of both parties tend to move to areas that are even more in line with their party preference than where they used to live, and this tendency increased the further people move (Ibid, p. 866).

Democrats have piled into urban areas, resulting in Democratic legislators being elected from these districts by very wide margins (wider than Republicans in suburban and rural districts). The result is Democrats "wasting" votes in urban districts while Republicans disperse their votes throughout more districts, which gives the GOP an electoral advantage in the House of Representatives (McDonald 2011, p. 530). Republican districts are often faster growing, especially in suburban areas, and contain more liberals than liberal districts contain conservatives. Regardless of what factors motivate migration, internal migration homogenizes electoral constituencies (Ibid, p. 528, 530).

Polarization is a well-documented phenomenon during the period this thesis focuses on. My second hypothesis reads as follows: *The polarization of American politics during the outlined period has resulted in the Republican Party adopting more extreme gun politics and explains its policy shift on guns.*

Presidential Nominations

For most of the 19th and 20th centuries, parties would nominate their presidential candidates in the same manner every four years. The who's who of party bosses and legislators would meet at a single location – the venue of the national convention (Cohen et.al. 2008, p. 93). These conventions mostly involved few or no members of the general public (Ibid, p. 1-2). Delegates selecting the party's nominee would largely be under the control of national and state party leaders as well as local party bosses. In some states your position as a locally elected official for your party would be in danger if you did not vote as instructed (Ibid, p. 93). The outcomes of the limited number of primaries – where actual voters participated – had little sway on the decision making at conventions (Ibid).

How party bosses and other vested interest (such as moneymen, industrial big wigs and union leaders) came to the decisions was never clear. Deals were made, and delegates could change hands quickly (Morris 2003). The vivid notion of the smoke-filled backroom has been used to describe the process behind the scenes at national conventions (Cohen et.al. 2008, p. 93). From 1832 – 1968 the nominees were selected in this manner – by state parties sending their delegates shortly before the convention to pick a nominee. This changed in 1972, when the McGovern-Fraser reform was adopted by the Democratic party, making conventions obsolete as the vehicle to nominate a candidate (Cohen et.al. 2008, p. 3). The GOP followed suit and democratized their nominating process in time for the 1976 election.

Reformation of the primary system came after the Democratic party lost the election of 1968, after nominating Vice President Hubert Humphrey. Unlike his rivals, Humphrey had not competed in a single primary[5] (Cohen et.al. 2008, p. 1). He still won the nomination on the first ballot. The obvious discrepancy between voter opinion and party choice was the straw that broke the camel's back and lead to the creation the McGovern-Fraser commission. Reforms were the result of ideological pressure within the party – mainly from liberal McCarthy and Kennedy supporters (Huckshorn 1983, p. 656). The most important change was that most delegates would be chosen in binding primaries and caucuses, meaning their vote on the first ballot at the convention would be tied to the result in their state (Steger 2000, p. 728).

Republicans did not have the same demand for a revamped delegate selection process as Democrats, who needed reform after the chaotic 1968 convention (Ibid). Republicans had not experienced internal battles after their ideological feud in 1964, where the choice conservative wing – Barry

[5] Senators Eugene McCarthy (D-MN) and Robert F. Kennedy (D-NY) won most of the primaries. The latter was mortally wounded by a gunman on the eve of his victory in the California primary, which was second to last.

Goldwater of Arizona – won the nomination (Ibid). Still, they thought it best to modernize their system. While Democrats went for a simple, proportional system for selecting delegates from state primaries, Republicans let states keep control, which meant more winner-take-all primaries. The Republican rules had always been widely agreed-upon, and this did not change after the reform (Huckshorn 1983, p. 657).

Giving primary voters more power can have a significant impact on a party's choice for President. Primary voters have been shown to favor more extreme candidates than general election voters (Brady et.al. 2007, Hummel 2013). Therefore, it has been common for Presidential candidates to try to court more extreme primary voters when campaigning for a party's nomination, and 'run to the middle' once the nomination is secured (Cohen et.al. 2008). Still, the party establishment usually gets its will in nominating a candidate for President – from 1980-2004 the Republican nominees were not just insiders, they were *party insiders* (Ibid, p. 170).

A possible explanation for how the Republican party changed its approach to gun policy is because of changes to the nominating process. Party politics is a vehicle that runs on the policy preferences of competing interests within a party, and if changing the formula resulted in Republican candidates having to appeal to more ideologically extreme voters over the last 40 years, then it is possible they have taken more conservative policy positions – including on guns. Due to the large megaphones of Presidential candidates, this may have changed the party-at-large.

My third hypothesis is as follows: *Reforming the presidential nominating process by democratizing the primary system resulted in more ideologically extreme Republican nominees, which in turn explains the Republican shift on gun policy.*

Chapter 3: Methodology

The NRA has been studied before, and polarization and Presidential elections are well studied – but there have not been any studies on the totality of the Republican party's relationship with gun policy. Therefore, this field represents somewhat uncharted territory. I have set my own course in finding data, relying on my own intuition, the guidance from my tutor, and inspiration from theories and other studies. This thesis represents my goal of combining the relevant topics to give a broader understanding of why Republican gun policy has changed over time. This topic is often covered with surface level information and overblown hot takes from traditional and social media, as well as from politicians. The methodological chapter is my attempt at tackling this issue in a levelheaded, scientific manner.

Taking a Political Science Approach to Historical Background

Chapters 4 and 5 constitute a brief historical mapping of the dependent variable – Republican gun policy – divided into eras showing the events of the post-war period. Chapter 4 shows the main developments over time, while Chapter 5 illuminates the policy stances and decisions of political leaders. Chapter 5 doubles as an empirical chapter where Republican leaders are used as a lens from which I can map developments over time.

I have chosen to tell a narrative of events to give the reader the necessary background knowledge to understand the topic, and to highlight the key developments and trends that support the data I present in chapter 6. In contrast to just highlighting the key events I've instead told a broad story as I have understood it. This is because there are dangers to studying single events separately. This could cause one to mistakenly interpret causality or give some decisions (or decision-makers) too much emphasis. Instead, I wanted to observe patterns over time. Republican gun policy did not change overnight – it happened gradually. Therefore, it is not enough to look at a few key events, but to also add several smaller events to the timeline in order to tell a detailed story.

As opposed to just creating a narrative, employing a political science approach means finding out what occurred and *how* by studying a historical process and using that knowledge as a tool (Moses and Knutsen 2007, p. 119). I will be using the historical chapter to draw conclusions about the four eras in relation to my empirical chapter later in my thesis.

Second-Party Data

I have relied on second- and third-party data in my empirical chapter. Most of the empirical basis of my thesis is reliant on older data and events, so I found it most effective to rely on other sources. However, much of this is raw data in need of processing before it could have any use in my thesis. Here, I lay out the second-party data I've processed and will be presenting in the following chapters.

Figure 7-7 shows roll-call data from six Senate votes on gun bills from five different Congresses. These votes were on final passage, cloture (a parliamentary move to end discussion on a bill), and various amendments on specific gun policies – and I recorded the votes of all individual Senators for all bills. To see how I coded these 3,008 votes, see table A1 in the appendix. The votes are from 1972, 1985, 1993, 1994, 2005, and 2013. All votes except the ones from 1972 were taken from the Senate archives available online at senate.gov, and the votes from before Congress started using electronic voting in 1981 were gathered from *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*. I categorized all 100 Senators for each of the six votes by party, state, urban or rural state, and Southern/Northern for Democrats. States with a higher share of its population living in urban areas than the country as a whole, according to the census of the state in the decade of the different votes, were categorized as *urban* states. *Rural Senators* were from states with a less than average urban population in the specific decades the gun votes took place. The Southern/Northern category was added to the test what the literature deemed to be the base of the conservative wing of the Democratic party in the South. I did not split Republicans into Northern/Southern Senators since there was not theory to support such a decision.

The middle data point in figure 7-7 shows how the Senate in the 103rd Congress voted on two different bills: *The Brady Bill* and two of its amendments in 1993, and the *Assault Weapons Ban* in 1994. Both bills came under consideration by the same Senate, with the same composition of party and state in all 50 states during both votes. Therefore, I found it best to code these two bills as one. This is to give that datapoint more weight and to more accurately reflect that they were voted on in the same political climate.[6] I did not use House data because of the lack of key amendment votes in the House. There were also no House votes in 2013. House data would have been more cumbersome to code but is something that can be added by anyone wishing to study this further.

To generate figure 7-7, I categorized Senators into their respective groups (Republican, Democrat, urban R, Urban D Rural R, Rural D, Northern D, and Southern D), and coded each vote as having been

[6] This was also beneficial as there were no amendment votes on the AWB. Therefore, had it been coded as its own category it would have been based on one vote per Senator, instead of four per Senator when combined with the three votes on the Brady Bill.

either pro-gun or in favor of gun control. I used my own judgement in evaluating each vote: Pro-gun votes are those in favor of protecting gun rights or gun manufacturers or opposing stricter gun laws; pro-gun control votes are voted for stricter gun control or to protect existing gun control; votes on cloture or final passage reflect my understanding of which side would gain from those votes using my interpretation of the lay of the land.

Table 5-1 shows gun mentions in party platforms over time. Here, I used the archives at *The Presidency Project* to count 'gun words' in every party platform from 1948 – 2016. I categorized 'gun words' as the words *gun*, *handgun*, *firearm*, and the terms *Second Amendment* and *the right to keep and bear arm*. After presenting this data in table 5-1, I re-organized them by era in table 5-2. This allows the pattern over time to become clearer while also matching the eras I identify in the historical chapter for consistency.

In chapter 5 I used quotes and policy positions from *The American Presidency Project* to track the quotes, statements and other possible instances where Republican President's and candidates spoke of gun policy, gun bills, or their general views on guns in public appearances and official statements. *The American Presidency Project* covers a vast landscape of Presidential politics but using their search feature allowed me to obtain valuable information of relevant statements from several of the political leaders identified in chapter 5. I used keywords to winnow down thousands of documents into only those with certain gun words, and then manually traced these for appropriate quotes.[7]

Table 8-1 shows the ideology of different Republican leaders that I have coded from searching the expansive datasets by Bonica (2016) and Poole et.al. (2015) – both publicly available. These datasets show the ideological scores of all 535 members of Congress all the way back to 1789 (Poole et.al.) and 1979 (Bonica).

Third-Party Data

I've also used third party data, which has been both gathered and processed before me by others. NRA membership data and grades are not available to the public, so I've relied on public statements and media sources for those. I have also processed data from *The Center for Responsive Politics* (who gathers and presents myriads of data on money in politics), which has been a source of financial data on the NRA-PVF and NRA-ILA. I also relied on data from Poole et.al. (2015) for figures 7-2 through 7-5

[7] This method included many run-ins with the word *begun*, but yielded results over time.

on the ideological gaps between the two parties in Congress over time. This and other relevant data points from other published works are presented as such.

Gun Policy as a Case Study

My thesis is a case study of gun policy in America after World War II. The case study is well suited for the purposes of my thesis as I am interested in using historical data to find answers to my hypothesis. The case study allows for a combination of the historian's approach with a social scientist's approach to testing theories (Moses and Knutsen 2007, p. 133). Case studies are often criticized for being too limited in scope to generalize based on one or a few cases (Ibid, p. 141). I avoid this conundrum by not attempting to generalize beyond my specific case, opting instead to use what King, Kohane, and Verba (1994) describe as "descriptive inference." This approach favors making causal inferences within my own case, as opposed to generalizing beyond my case – the latter constitutes a "causal inference." Descriptive inferences are made by harnessing the data that is at the core of my case, staying clear of peripheral data, and removing the noise so that we are left with only that which is systematic about the case. In this way, King, Keohane and Verba (1994) suggest that we can make causal inferences within a case. I have combined the case study with the method of process tracing to study a sequence of events with the goal of establishing a historical timeline and making plausible interpretations of quantitative data.

My goal is to provide U.S. specific knowledge based on a U.S. specific case. This limitation is needed to preserve the clarity of my analysis and conclusion since the process, actors, and (to an extent) the political institutions are quite U.S. specific. I have still had to rely on more universal knowledge to generate my hypothesis. My literature chapter involves works covering general fields. This kind of literature – such as that on lobbying, the two-party system, and polarization – allows me to generate hypothesis to be tested. By this logic my thesis belongs in the naturalistic tradition of science rather than the interpretivist tradition.

Process Tracing and the Logic of Covariance

To aid in answering my thesis question, I have used two logics, one based on process tracing and another on covariance. The logic of covariance allows me to establish hypotheses and see whether I can identify any joint variability between the different independent and the dependent variable. As an example, did NRA funding increase at the same time as the Republican party became more pro-

gun? This is akin to the logic in John Stuart Mill's comparative methods, apart from the fact that I only have one case.

However, to substantiate that the relationship between the independent and dependent variable is causal, and thus more than just a covariation, I need process tracing. Process tracing is useful because it allows me to find historical explanations of an individual case by uncovering causal links (Ibid, p. 225). In my historical chapters I describe *what* happened, then I later use this knowledge and combine it with descriptive, quantitative data to understand the *how* and *why* it happened. In other words, I am tracing the postulated causal mechanism through the case.

Beach (2017, p. 1) describes process tracing broadly as "a research method for tracing causal mechanisms using detailed, within-case empirical analysis of how a causal process plays out in an actual case." This framework is applicable for a study of this nature, as it works well for understanding the causal dynamics that have resulted in certain outcomes – including historical ones (Ibid, p. 2).

Process tracing fits my study as it is optimal for single-case designs, meaning that the only substance that can be acquired from the results are the causal mechanisms *within* the case, as other cases would require other processes to be traced (Beach 2017, p. 2). These claims are also asymmetrical, which means one cannot make any claims about possible outcomes if a cause was removed, i.e. if a mechanism was not present (Beach and Rohlfing 2015, p. 13).

I do not have a vast, unifying dataset from which to obtain meaning, and therefore the method of process tracing is used. This means I will not be able to use the standardized statistical approaches to measure causality or asses validity, reliability and other factors – as is beneficial to other methods, i.e. regression analysis. While I have not used a statistical method, I have instead used mechanistic evidence, which is data concerning *how* something came about. While statistical evidence is most widely analyzed as evidence of difference-making, so can mechanistic evidence be analyzed – and I will do so (Marchionni and Reijula 2018, p. 2). I use both quantitative and qualitative data as descriptive inputs.

This means I will have to apply an honest assessment of the facts and causalities at hand in a manner that is less standardized – but equally valid although not subject to the same accuracy of measurement as in statistical modelling. To do this, I will rely mostly on assessing the covariance between variables. In this sense, I find myself in the naturalist tradition where correlation is based on parts being logically or systematically related to each other (Moses and Knutsen 2007, p. 30).

I have relied on evaluating covariance in my analysis chapter, but still applied process tracing to understand the processes I have studied. Had I used a large-n comparative study there would not be

a need for process tracing in addition to covariance, as I could have made use of statistical tests. Therefore, process tracing is a tool that allows me to find escape the traps of the case study but giving me the tool to explain potential underlying variables and the relationship between variables.

To probe the mechanisms that link causes and outcomes, I have employed a *systems understanding* of mechanisms. This version of process tracing means trying to unpack each part of the different mechanisms that link causes and outcomes empirically. The goal is to strengthen my ability to explain the link between causes and outcomes by tracing individual parts empirically. Beach (2017) explains this as "observing the empirical fingerprints left by the activities of entities in each part of the process" to be able to make strong causal inferences about causal processes in the real-world (p. 5). This hits the nail on the head in explaining my approach.

Validity and Reliability

Validity concerns whether or not I measure what I seek to measure. When it comes to internal validity – having enough control over variables to confidently assert that correlation equals causation (Moses and Knutsen 2007, p. 60) – I am satisfied with my thesis. I feel confident that the results I have produced are answering the hypotheses I have laid out, and that my findings can be explained by my data, and not some underlying cause that I have not tested. Testing polarization as its own variable helps with internal validity, as it is an underlying factor in many aspects of American politics that I attempt to bring to the forefront as a possible cause. External validity is not much of a concern for the simple reason that my thesis is attempting to explain a single case without generalizing. Causal inference is not the goal.

The general reliability of the thesis is good, although not perfect. My sources are good, and especially my second-party data has high degrees of reliability, as I have been able to find roll-call data on votes and textual data on gun policy from quotes and party platforms that allow me to present events and individuals with quotes and votes that accurately portray them. However, as with most lobbying there is ample reason to believe that there is considerable activity going on behind the scenes. As I have not had access to lobbyists or lawmakers, I can only report on behind-the-scenes activity described in the media at later dates. This most likely means that this thesis under-communicates the amount of informal contacts between politicians and interest groups. I have not interviewed any sources with direct knowledge of events – in favor of relying on later retellings of events. While this is obviously a weakness of the thesis, it is not one I believe I could have realistically been remedied within the scope of my master's thesis without changing the focus exclusively to lobbying.

Chapter 4: Historical Background – The Four Eras

1945 – 1968: The Post-War Years

After World War II, millions of American soldiers returned home from serving abroad, and many had an interest in guns and hunting. Gun control was not a notable issue in first post-war years, and the NRA spent this time serving its growing number of hunting enthusiast members (Brown 2012). The 1940s and 50s was the era of Hollywood Western's and cowboy comic strips, glorifying gun culture and inspiring a generation of young boys to play with toy guns (Carter 2002, p. 831). Under the gun laws that were in effect during the 50s and 60s the NRA enjoyed special provisions with certain state and federal exemptions that gave them an advantage in arranging pistol and range shooting competitions, which they were heavily involved with (Patrick 2010). These were taken away because by the *Gun Control Act of 1968* (GCA), which caused a decline in these activities by the NRA (Ibid). The crime rates increased in the 1960s, and the ensuing debate brought firearms partly into the discussion (Carter 2002, p. 212).

The NRA was not involved in much politics at this time, and gun aficionados were mostly concerned with hunting, collecting, and shooting in the 50s and early 60s (Patrick 2010). Gun control was almost a non-issue at the time, but it did start to creep back into relevancy. In 1958, Senator Thomas Dodd (D-Connecticut) began drafting what would become the GCA ten years later, after gun manufacturers called on him to stop the sale of cheap war rifles by mail, as it was hurting the manufacturer's (Carter 2002, p. 800). These stocks of surplus World War II rifles were being sold in large quantities for the low cost of $25 to $40. Rifles were advertised in magazines, such as the NRA magazine *The American Rifleman*, and the modern gun control debate came to life after it became known that Lee Harvey Oswald had used one of these mail-ordered rifles to shoot President Kennedy (Carter 2002, p. 378). This brought life back into Sen. Dodd's bill, but it was not prioritized for passage (Ibid).

There was a debate in the 1960s to ban so-called *Saturday night specials*, which were small, cheap handguns that were often used for crimes and then disposed of (Carter 2002, p. 516). Several NRA members wrote an editorial in the *The American Rifleman* supporting this ban in 1968, stating that they did "not necessarily approve of everything that goes 'Bang!'" (Sugarmann 1992). The NRA's Executive Vice President Franklin L. Orth told Congress that "the National Rifle Association concurs in principle with the desirability of removing from the market crudely made and unsafe handguns […] [because] they have no sporting purpose, they are frequently poorly made. […] On Saturday Night Specials we are for [banning] it 100 percent. We would like to get rid of these guns" (Sugarmann 1992, p. 42).

1968 – 1992: Gun Control on the Agenda

Not until the killings of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy in 1968 would firearms be at the forefront of the political agenda. This resulted in Sen. Dodd's bill being passed, which eliminated the inter-state transfer of firearms to non-dealers.[8] This was the first federal gun control law since 1938 (Congressional Quarterly 1968). The law also banned the import of *Saturday Night Specials* (Carter 2002, p. 516). These weapons would still be produced nationally and continue to be controversial (Ibid).

During the mid-70s, the NRA became a more significant player in American politics. The organization had supported the GCA, although it had lobbied to thwart the most far-reaching aspects, such as a gun registry (Coleman 2016). Due to support from gun manufacturers, the bill was able to pass without too much opposition. After having lobbied Congress and joined in the construction of gun bills through most of the 20th century, the NRA would change their modus operandi in the mid-70s. Moving more towards seeing all gun restricts as limits on the Second Amendment right of the individual (Ibid).

This change can be traced back to the NRAs national convention in 1977. In the two years before this, the NRA had already cemented its place in politics by creating a lobbying arm, the *Institute for Legislative Action* (NRA-ILA) in 1975, and its political action committee, the *Political Victory Fund* (NRA-PVI) in 1976, in time for the 1976 elections. At the 1977 convention in Cincinnati, members that wanted to involve the NRA heavily with politics, and for the NRA to fill the role as "the gun lobby," won enough votes to replace the old leadership, and change the bylaws (Know 2009, p. 299). The bylaw changes included strengthening the NRA-ILA and making it easier for members to change the bylaws in the future (Knox 2009, p. 300).

This shift was not instantaneous, as the NRA had moved slowly toward a more extreme position in the years before the leadership changes. President Richard Nixon and his aides were decrying the power of the gun lobby during the early 70s.[9] The NRA also started working on changing the definition of the Second Amendment in the 1970s. At this time there was a surge in law review articles supporting the claim that carrying a gun was an individual right (at the time the Supreme Court held that the Second Amendment was a militia amendment, guaranteeing a collective right to

[8] Individuals could still technically order firearms through the mail, but they would have to receive them in-person at a licensed dealer, which meant there was little point to mail-ordering (Carter 2002).
[9] In March 1973, aide John Ehrlichman was telling Nixon that gun control was a "loser issue for us." "You've got a highly mobilized lobby," he told the president. "I think what we have to do is carve out a little piece of it, and Saturday night specials, of course, has been our tactic."

bear arms). The number of articles endorsing the individual right grew from three (of 25) before 1970 to 27 out of 52 after 1970. At least 16 of these 27 were written by lawyers who had represented or been employed by the NRA or other gun rights organizations (Bogus 2000, p. 8).

In 1980, the NRA endorsed its first Presidential candidate in Republican Ronald Reagan (Carter 2002). During the campaign, Reagan had supported the *Federal Firearms Reform Act of 1979* (FFRA), which was a partial repeal of the GCA. Upon taking office, the Reagan administration told the NRA that FFRA had to wait, taking a backseat to economic legislative goals (Carter 2002, p. 242). Reagan did find the time to repeal two amendments of the GCA, and the NRA endorsed him again in 1984 (Ibid).

The FFRA passed Congress in 1986, under the name *Firearm Owners Protection Act* (FOPA) and was signed by President Reagan on 19 May 1986 (Carter 2002, p. 242). The bill passed the Senate with 79 votes for, and 15 against, and had 53 co-sponsors, 13 of whom were Democrats (C-SPAN Congressional Chronicle). FOPA repealed portions of the GCA, resulting in the elimination of the record keeping of ammunition sales, the legalization of inter-state sales of rifles, and required federal agents to give early notice of inspections to gun dealers (Langbein and Lotwis 1990, p. 416). The first provision of the bill stated that Congress believed the Second Amendment to guarantee the individual the right to bear arms (Carter 2002, p. 242).

In 1988, the NRA endorsed the winning candidacy of Vice President George H.W. Bush for President and spent $6 million in support of his candidacy (Carter 2002, p. 345). The only notable gun legislation to be proposed during Bush's term was the *Brady Handgun Prevention Act* (Brady Bill), which would have imposed a mandatory federal background check on anyone attempting to purchase a firearm from a licensed dealer, as well as imposing a five-day waiting period on purchases (Moore 1994, p. 434). The bill was not put up to a vote during the tenure of President Bush.

Running for re-election in 1992, George Bush did not receive the endorsement of the NRA (Carter 2002, p. 94). The reason being that he in 1989 enacted a temporary ban on the import of certain assault rifles following a school shooting that killed five children with an AK-47 in Stockton, California (Ibid, p. 36). After enacting the ban, *The American Rifleman* editorial criticized the ban as a move towards all guns, and called on gun owners to say, “Enough is enough. Leave our rights alone!” Bush’s office then got 4,000 letters and calls opposing the ban (Lacombe 2018, p. 27). Bush ended up losing the election to Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton, who supported the Brady Bill (Carter 2002).

1993 – 2004: Clinton and the Assault Weapons Ban

What I call the third era starts with the Inauguration of President Bill Clinton (1993-2001) on 20 January 1993. Clinton had supported stricter gun control as a candidate and would go on to sign two bills that radically altered American gun policy. First was the *Brady Bill*, which was signed into law 20 November 1993. It established the background check system and a five-day waiting period on all handgun purchases (Moore 1994, p. 434). The other was the *Assault Weapons Ban of 1994*, which was passed as a provision of the *Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994*, and outlawed the "manufacture, transfer, and possession" of a select group of semiautomatic weapons that, according to ban supporters, were useful for military operations, but not for hunting, sports shooting, or self-defense (Koper and Roth 2002, p. 240).

The new gun regulations of Clinton's first term made the him an enemy of the NRA, who made ousting him from the White House their top priority in the 1996 elections (Marcus 1996). Despite this, they ended up not endorsing a candidate in the Presidential race of 1996. The reason was that Bob Dole, the Republican Presidential candidate, had angered the organization by stating he would probably veto a repeal of the assault weapons ban (Ibid). Dole lost the election, and Clinton was re-elected (Kalb 2015).

Gun control was put on the agenda again in 1999, after a school shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado killed 15 people (Carter 2002, p. 181). Guns were one of the factors blamed for the incident, and the weapons used had been bought at a gun show for private citizens[10] (ibid, p. 183-6). At such events, background checks are bypassed since purchasing a weapon at a gun show is regarded as a private sale. There was an attempt to regulate them through the *Gun Show Accountability Act* in 1999, but the measure failed to get a vote (GovTrack 2018). The NRA, which was to hold its annual meeting in Denver, Colorado later the same month, came under heavy criticism for not cancelling or moving their gathering (Carter 2002, p. 187).

In 2000, the NRA chose not to endorse Republican George W. Bush for President in order to avoid controversy during a close election (The New York Times 2000). During their convention in May of that year, NRA President Charlton Heston gave an infamous speech where he held up a flintlock long rifle and declared that Mr. Gore would have to take his guns "from my cold, dead hands," while holding the rifle over his head (Carter 2002, p. 291-2).

[10] Others factor that were blames included video games, music, the Goth sub-culture, and psychological troubles among the perpetrators.

The assault weapons ban expired on 13 September 2004, in accordance with a provision in the bill, and the ban was not renewed (Koper and Roth, 2002). The effectiveness of the bill was seen as mixed by those studying the matter (Ibid). For the 2004 Presidential election, the NRA made a Presidential endorsement for the first time since 1988, and again for a Bush (NRA-ILA 2004). President George W. Bush was successful in securing a second term (Kalb 2015).

2005 – 2018: Mass Shootings and Unsuccessful Reform Efforts

The only gun control bill to be passed during George W. Bush's second term was the *Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act* (PLCAA). The 2005 law limited the types of civil lawsuits that could be brought against firearms manufacturers for the damages caused by their products by others (Jiang 2007, p. 537). The bill, which was desirable to the gun lobby, was voted for by a near unified Republican party. The GOP saw only four defections in the House and two in the Senate, while Democrats had 15 supporters from 45 senators, and 59 from 206 House members (US Senate and House records, 2005).

Two years later, in April 2007, there was a school shooting at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute (Virginia Tech), where 32 people were killed by a lone gunman using semi-automatic pistols (Kwon and Moon 2009, p. 270). The incident kickstarted another round of gun policy debates, but no new laws were enacted (Ibid).

In 2008, the gun debate saw a major development with the Supreme Court case of *District of Columbia v Heller*. In the case, referred to as *Heller*, the court set new precedence for interpreting the Second Amendment. The main divide in opinion was on whether the right to bear arms was a collective right for militias or an individual right to self-protection regardless of militia connection (*Kraśnicka* 2014, p. 129). The case dealt with a District of Columbia handgun ban, and the individual right was established on a 5-4 basis. The previously held view was established in the 1939 case of *United States v Miller*, where the court upheld the collective rights stand, stating in the majority opinion that "the obvious purpose" of the Second Amendment was "to assure the continuation and render possible the effectiveness of militia" (Ibid, p. 130-1).[11]

2008 also saw the election of Barack Obama to the presidency over NRA backed Republican John McCain (Kalb 2015). Guns had not been a defining topic of the campaign, and even the Democratic

[11] This was affirmed in 1981 with the federal appeals court holding in *Quilici v Village of Morton Grove*, which upheld a handgun ban, that the Supreme Court refused to hear (Carter 2002, p. 697).

candidates had not called for much gun control during their primary debates. Both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton had remained moderate on the issue (Obama 2008, Clinton 2008).

2012 saw the re-election of President Obama over his NRA endorsed opponent, Republican Mitt Romney (NRA-PVF, 2012). Guns came back on the agenda after two 2012 shootings. In July, 12 movie-goers were killed, and 70 more injured, in Aurora, Colorado by a lone gunman using a semi-automatic weapon. In December 20 first-graders and six faculty members were killed by a similar weapon at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut (Miller 2015, p. 635).

The public's desire for gun control jumped by 15 percentage points directly after the Sandy Hook shooting but fell nine points in the following nine month (Gallup). Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-California) introduced a bill that would have banned 150 firearms, as well as magazines with a capacity of more than 10 rounds (US Senate records, 2013). The bill, known as the *Assault Weapons Ban of 2013* was defeated after garnering only 40 votes in the Senate (Ibid). There was a bipartisan gun bill proposed by Senators Joe Manchin (D-West Virginia) and Pat Toomey (R-Pennsylvania) that the NRA worked with before pulling support due to pressure from its own members and more extreme gun rights groups (Draper 2013). None of the proposals were successful.

After reform efforts failed in the U.S. Congress in early 2013, they proved successful in Colorado. The state had responded to the Aurora shooting by enacting bills that banned gun magazines holding more than 15 bullets, required universal background checks, and made gun buyers pay for their background checks (People & Politics, 2013). After this, pro-gun activists successfully recalled two of four targeted pro-gun Democratic control state senators in new elections (Ibid). The recall elections were successful despite of the NRA being outspent by Michael Bloomberg's gun control advocacy PAC *Everytown for Gun Safety* (Draper 2013).

In 2016, the NRA endorsed Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump. The endorsement, which came on 20 May, was the earliest of its kind in the organization's history (Hamburger et.al. 2017). The NRA-PVF spent $30.3 million dollars on the Presidential race that Trump won – $19.6 million opposing Hillary Clinton, $10.6 million supporting Trump (The Center for Responsive Politics (2017).

Shootings in Orlando (49 killed), Las Vegas (58 killed, 540 injured), and Parkland, Florida (17 killed) between 2016 and 2018 caused further division (Brymer 2018, p. S29, Jaffe 2018, p. 2487). After the Orlando shooting in 2016, four gun bills were voted on in the U.S. Senate eight days later.[12] All four

[12] These weas a Republican bill that aimed to improve background checks and study psychological factors involved in mass shootings, a Democratic proposal to require background checks on all gun purchases

bills failed after a series of votes mainly along party lines (Phillips 2016). The students from the Parkland High School responded by organizing a rally in Washington, D.C. called *March for Our Lives* that was attended by roughly 200,000 people in the capital and a total of 1,2 million in over 800 affiliated marches across the country (Durando 2018). Many rally speakers turned the gun rights rhetoric on its head, and instead referenced their rights to be protected from harm.

The NRA responded in controversial manner after these shootings. After Parkland, Executive Director Chris Cox said "the increase in mass shootings is a much-hyped myth. The drop in gun crime is a little noticed reality" (Phillips 2016). The NRA responded to calls for gun control after the Parkland shooting by saying that "banning guns from law-abiding citizens based on the criminal act of a madman will do nothing to prevent future attacks" (Durando 2018). After Las Vegas, the NRA stated that it was unfortunate that politicians keep calling for gun control, that it supported the banning of bump stocks and the passing of "National Right-to Carry" law allow citizens to "defend themselves and their families from acts of violence" (LaPierre and Cox 2017).

(expanding them to private and gun show sales), a Republican proposal to try to prevent those on the FBI's terrorist watch list to buy weapons, and a Democratic version of this proposal (Phillips 2016).

Chapter 5: Empirical Evidence on Republican Leaders

In this chapter, I will present quotes, opinions, and gun policy positions by Republican leaders across the four eras. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate how gun policy developed over time. Since I cannot go into all Republicans, party leaders offer good and reliable datapoints across time. These are the thought leaders of the party, so their opinions are likely to have been accepted within the party.

The First Era: 1945 – 1968

My searches through the records have not yielded any findings of comments on gun policy from either Thomas Dewey, the Republican for President in 1944 and 1948, or Richard Nixon, the Vice President from 1953-1961 and 1960 Republican nominee for President.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

President Eisenhower (1953-1961) did not deal with the issue of gun control during his time in office, and no gun bill was passed through the Congress at this time. My deep-dives into the database of *The American Presidency Project* only yielded one Eisenhower quote on gun policy. He was asked at a news conference in August 1958 whether he felt there was need for more federal restrictions on "the ownership and use of firearms by civilians" in response to an FBI report on a record high crime rate. Eisenhower said he needed to consult with local police forces and the FBI "in order to have a worthwhile opinion of my own," but that his instant reaction was that "if there maybe weren't so many of these weapons around, why, maybe you could be a little more peaceful" (Eisenhower 1958).

The Second Era: 1968 – 1992

Gun policy first appeared in the Republican party platform, written at the national convention before every Presidential election, in 1968, and has been mentioned ever since. From 1976 on, every edition has reiterated the party's dedication to defend the Second Amendment. All platforms from 1976 to 1992 also called for mandatory sentencing for armed felonies (The American Presidency Project).

Richard M. Nixon

President Richard Nixon (1969-1974) was elected in 1968 on a platform that promoted the "enactment of legislation to control indiscriminate availability of firearms, safeguarding the right of responsible citizens to collect, own and use firearms fore legitimate purposes, retaining primary responsibility at the state level, with such federal laws as necessary to better enable the states to meet their responsibility."

As President, Nixon's support for gun control was limited to banning the sale of *Saturday Night Specials*. During a news conference in June of 1972 after the shooting of Governor George Wallace Nixon stated "I have always felt there should be a Federal law for the control of handguns. […] The problem there is to write the law, the legislation, in such a way that it is precise and deals with that kind of handgun which ought to be controlled. And I am referring now to the Saturday night specials." The party platform he ran on in 1972 reiterated this point.

After the shooting of Senator John Stennis the following year, Nixon reiterated his feelings on *Saturday night specials*, and added "Let me say, personally, I have never hunted in my life. I have no interest in guns and so forth. I am not interested in the National Rifle Association or anything from a personal standpoint. But I do know that, in terms of the United States Congress, what we need is a precise definition which will keep the guns out of the hands of the criminals and not one that will infringe on the rights of others to have them for their own purposes in a legitimate way" (Nixon 1973).

Nixon's proposed law never made it through the Senate, and Nixon did not sign a Democratic proposal that passed. In his "State of the Union Message to Congress on Law Enforcement and Drug Abuse Prevention" on 14 March 1973, Nixon stated his intention to propose new legislation to curb the "manufacture and sale of cheap handguns commonly known as Saturday night specials" and impose "mandatory minimum prison terms for […] persons using dangerous weapons in the execution of a crime."

In 1999, New York Times journalist William Safire wrote that in a 1969 interview, Nixon admitted that he thought guns an "abomination" (Safire 1999). Oval Office recordings have revealed this to have been a topic of discussion during his tenure as President. In an obscenity-laced discussion with aides, Nixon once asked, "can't we go after handguns, period?" and said, "I know the rifle association will be against it, the gun makers will be against it [but] people should not have handguns" (Associated Press 2013). Nixon was elected the same year the GCA became law, and his administrations enforcement of this law was consistent with his personal feelings on guns (Carter 2002, p. 241).

Gerald R. Ford

President Gerald Ford (1974-1977) was a supporter of gun rights. He believed that any gun law would have to avoid infringing "upon the rights of law-abiding citizens" (Ford 1975). In addition, he was "unalterably opposed to federal registration of guns or the licensing of gun owners," and later specified that "I don't think if you want go hunting you have to go and register your firearm" (Ibid). With these caveats in place, Ford was not opposed to any gun legislation, and after reiterating them during a special message to Congress on crime in 1975 made it clear that "nonetheless, we can take steps to further guard against the illicit use of handguns by criminals" (Ibid).[13]

Ford agreed with Nixon that legislation needed to be put together to deal with *Saturday night specials*, and his recipe was a three-point plan: Mandatory prison sentences for gun crimes, extend restrictions on *Saturday night specials*, hiring 500 additional employees for the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Division (ATF) of the Treasury Department (Ibid). Ford's Vice President, Nelson Rockefeller of New York, was known as an advocate of gun control (Cottrol 1994, p. 70). During the nationwide gun debate that lead to the gun bill in 1968, Rockefeller advocated as Governor of New York for state-wide licensing of all rifles (McDowell 2007).[14]

Ronald Reagan

President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) was an ardent opponent of gun control. He was asked about gun violence many times during his presidency, and his answers rarely changed. He often used the strict gun laws of Washington, D.C. as an example of why such policies did not work, as well as statements of the following kind: "I don't believe there's any way you can keep the criminal from getting a gun" and "focusing on gun control […] could very well be diverting us from […] what needs to be done if we're to solve the crime problem" (Reagan 1982).

Mandatory sentencing for gun crimes was a cornerstone of Reagans solution to gun crime. He often bragged about a California law he signed that added five to 15 years to any gun related crime (Reagan 1981). In January of 1983, Reagan signed into law two amendments that repealed parts of the GCA. One of them had required record-keeping of the identity of those buying certain ammunition. Reagan signed the *Firearm Owners Protection Act* in 1986.

[13] He further stated "the Congress passed about 4 years ago a law prohibiting the importation of Saturday night specials. That has not been effective, because the importers send the parts over and Americans put them together and then sell them."

[14] When Ford ran for a full term in 1976, Rockefeller was replaced on the ticket by Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kansas) and the party platform stated the party's opposition to a gun registry.

George H.W. Bush

President George H.W. Bush (1989 – 1993) was more moderate on guns than Ronald Reagan. During his tenure in Congress, Bush had been the only member of the Texas delegation in the House to vote «yes» on the GCA (Carter 2002, p. 241).

As President, Bush sought to deal with gun crime mainly through his proposed *Crime Control Act*, which was signed into law in 1990. The plan laid out in this bill was to enact stricter punishment for those using firearms in criminal acts. Bush also asked for legislative support from Congress for the prohibition of "the importation, manufacture, sale, or transfer of these insidious gun magazines of more than 15 rounds" (Bush 1989).

The crime bill included the *Gun-Free School Zones Act*, which made it a federal crime to carry a gun at a school unauthorized (Carter 2002, p. 623).[15] Bush was not a supporter of assault weapons. He stated during a news conference in February 1989 that he'd like "to find some way to do something about these automated weapons" and "to see some way to enforce the laws that are already on the books about automated AK47's coming into this country" (Bush 1989).

In July of 1989 President Bush suspended the importation of 24 semi-automatic weapons and directed the Treasury Department to "review the suitability of these weapons for sporting purposes (Ibid)." The ban was lifted the following July, and the manufacturers were made to redesign certain weapons to comply with the sporting purposes clause of the GCA. Later that year, Bush ended up opposing the proposed *Assault Weapon Import Control Act of 1989* on the grounds that it would remove a power of the Treasury Secretary to review rifles on a case-by-case basis to determine if they meet the "sporting purposes" standard on the GCA (Bush 1989).

The biggest gun control issue of Bush's term was the proposed *Brady Bill*. Bush opposed the bill because it was not incorporated into his proposed crime bill. Bush was willing to bargain, stating "If the Congress acts favorably on the President's comprehensive crime bill, the President will accept […] appropriate measures to identify felons attempting to purchase handguns" (Bush 1991). During a Presidential debate in 1992, Bush said one of the reasons for opposing the Brady Bill was that it was not tough enough on criminals (Bush 1992).

[15] The law was later found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

Bob Dole

Senator Bob Dole of Kansas (1969 – 1996) was the Republican leader in the U.S. Senate from 1985 to 1996 and the Republican candidate for President in 1996. He voted in favor of FOPA and against the *Brady Bill* and the assault weapons ban.

Dole, as Senate Minority Leader, led the years long Republican opposition to the *Brady Bill* before its signing in 1993, including a last-ditch filibuster that was dropped due to public opposition (Krauss 1993, p. 1). The main Republican opposition was against the waiting period of five working days for any gun purchase in states that did not have an instant background check system.

The Third Era: 1993 – 2004

Bob Dole, cont.

In March 1995, Dole told the NRA "I hope to have a bill on President Clinton's desk by this summer" to repeal the "ill-conceived" assault weapons ban (Gray 1995, p. 1). He announced his candidacy for President the next month. In June 1996 Dole, then the presumptive Republican nominee for President, called the assault weapons ban "naïve," said an instant background check system was the way to control guns, and stated his intention to mandate it in all 50 states (Seelye 1996, p. 9).

During a Presidential debate in 1996 Dole was asked if he would "seek to repeal the *Brady bill* and the ban on assault weapons?" His response was "not if I didn't have a better idea, but I've got a better idea." Dole promoted the instant background check system that was under development nation-wide. He also criticized the *Brady Bill* and the assault weapons ban for leading to few prosecutions, and the assault weapons ban for being irrelevant due to modified versions of banned weapons being allowed onto the market (Dole 1996).

Newt Gingrich

Newt Gingrich (Speaker of the House, 1995-1999) had a big role in setting the agenda for the Republicans in Congress. Therefore, his policy positions are aligned with the GOP during this period.[16]

Gingrich became Speaker after leading the GOP's mid-term win in 1994, which was spear-headed by the party's 10-point *Contract with America*. The contract does not include a promise on gun control,

[16] I have not succeeded in finding his complete roll-call history on gun bills prior to becoming Speaker, but I have found no reason to suggest he has bucked the party line on this issue.

but it did include a crime bill with the option for prosecutors to take gun crimes to federal courts, where they would be able to acquire mandatory sentencing (Gingrich 1994, p. 60-61). Gingrich had the support of the NRA during the 1994 campaign (Dreyfuss, 1995).

When he became Speaker in 1995, Gingrich vowed to repeal the assault weapons ban and wrote a letter to the NRA promising that no new gun control legislation would be enacted during his speakership (Jacobs, 2002). In 1995, Gingrich made a deal with the NRA to postpone repeal efforts of the assault weapons ban in favor of working on a general crime bill (Seelye 1995, p. A7). A repeal effort was made in 1996, passing the House by a 213-173 margin and subsequently failing to get out of committee in the Senate (Hook 1996).

In his 1996 book *To Renew America*, Gingrich explained his interpretation of the Second Amendment as one that has nothing to do with hunting, target practice, or weapon collecting. Instead, "The 2nd Amendment is a political right written for the purpose of protecting individual citizens from their own government" (Gingrich 1996, p. 202). Gingrich voted for the Domestic Violence Offender Gun Ban in 1996, which banned those convicted of domestic violence from owning firearms.

George W. Bush

While Governor of Texas in 1995, President George W. Bush (2001-2009) legalized the concealed carry of guns for those over 21 years of age – saying it would "make Texas a safer place" (Associated Press, 1995). As a Presidential candidate in 2000, Bush expressed support for some gun control measures. This including the ban on assault weapons (which was existing law), instant background checks, raising the age-limit on handguns from 18 to 21, and banning some high capacity magazines (Balz, 1999 and Holland, 2000). He did not support a waiting period on gun purchases, as prescribed in the *Brady Bill* (Ibid). During the primary campaign he expressed support for tough gun laws punishing illegal sales of guns, as well as "certain jail" for anybody breaking the law with a gun, and the opinion that juvenile justice laws had to be toughened up (Bush, 1999, 2000).

During a GOP primary debate in Des Moines, Iowa in December 1999, Bush said he opposed mandatory trigger locks on guns being manufactured, because he felt it would be difficult to enforce. His support stopped at the voluntary use to trigger locks – "I don't mind trigger locks being sold […] but the question is how do we enforce it?" (Ibid). This was in response to Senator John McCain of Arizona's support of the measure. Two months after McCain dropped out, and Bush had all but secured the nomination, he changed his mind: "…if I become the president, I'm going to ask Congress to appropriate money for a national program to […] distribute trigger locks for people to use." His

proposal was for the federal government to make $325 million a year available over five years to purchase trigger locks to give to citizens who ask for them (The New York Times, 2000). He also stated that he would sign a law mandating trigger locks with handguns sales, but that he would not seek this legislation.

When accepting the Republican nomination for President, Bush said that finally enforcing the nation's strict gun laws was the way to help protect "children in our schools and streets" (Bush, 2000). During a Presidential debate with Vice President Al Gore in October 2000, Bush laid out his thoughts on gun policy. He said he would "[support] programs like Project Exile where the federal government intensifies arresting people who illegally use guns," and "I don't think we ought to be selling guns to people who shouldn't have them. That's why I support instant background checks at gun shows" (Bush 2000). He also supported gun-free schools, saying "everybody believes that" (Ibid). He also stated that he believed the country needed "some common-sense gun safety" to control a "flood of cheap handguns […] that are getting into the wrong hands" (Ibid).

While Bush sounded like a reformer during the campaign, he did not oversee any gun reforms as President. In March of 2004, the renewal date for the Assault Weapons Ban of 1994 came and went. President Bush had stated he would sign the bill if it passed through Congress, but he did not campaign for the bill (Epstein 2004). Bush defended this during a Presidential debate in October 2004 by saying that while he supported extending the ban there were not enough votes for it in Congress. He also said that while he does believe in background checks at gun shows and that prosecuting gun crimes is the best way to deal with the problem (Bush 2004).

The Fourth Era: 2005 – 2018

George W. Bush, cont.

The signature gun law during Bush's time in The White House was the PLCAA, which was signed into law 26 October 2005 after the Bush White House had been a strong supporter of the legislation. In one of three support statements during the process of working the bill through Congress, the President stated that "the manufacturer or seller of a legal, non-defective product should not be held liable for the criminal or unlawful misuse of that product by others" (Bush 2005).

John McCain

Senator John McCain (1987-2018) was a mainline conservative on guns. He voted against both the *Brady Bill* and the AWB. He ran for the Republican nomination for President in 2000, where his support for mandatory trigger locks forced George W. Bush to accept his position. During a debate in December 1999 he said, “I've been saying for a long time, Tom, that it's not just the availability of guns, although obviously existing laws have to be enforced and we have to do other things such as pursue technology that only allows the owner of a gun to fire it” (Bush 1999).

In 2013, McCain voted against the *Assault Weapons Ban of 2013*. When defending his position on CBS’ *Face the Nation*, McCain applauded “the conversation” on guns, and praised Senator Joe Manchin’s efforts, but said “to somehow believe that just by taking guns away from people is the answer – I don’t think history shows that that’s the right way to do it” (McCain, 2013). During the interview he also pointed to Norway, “a country with the most stringent gun laws,” where “a guy was able to slaughter huge numbers of people” (McCain 2013).

Mitt Romney

Governor Mitt Romney (2003-2007) of Massachusetts was a moderate Republican in a Democratic state. During his tenure he signed an assault-weapons ban in 2004. The ban was a compromise between pro-gun rights groups and anti-gun activists. The law continued the national ban at the state level while also making it easier to own other guns, as well as establishing a review board for gun license restoration (Whitehurst 2018).

When running for the Republican Presidential nomination in 2008, Romney was criticized for the ban, and defended it by pointing to it being a compromise. Romney affirmed his support of second amendment rights, and that he believed these to be the rights of the individual (Romney, 2008). During a debate in May 2007 he said, “there's no question that I support Second Amendment rights, but I also support an assault weapon ban” (Romney, 2007). During a primary debate on 16 January 2012, while running for the Republican nomination for President, he said, “My view is that we have the second amendment right to bear arms and in this country my view is also that we should not add new legislation” (Romney 2012).

In a general election debate with Barack Obama in 2012 the topic of guns came up. Romney said “Yes, I'm not in favor of new pieces of legislation on guns and taking guns away or making certain guns illegal. We, of course, don't want to have automatic weapons, and that's already illegal in this

country to have automatic weapons." He went on to say that a change in culture and better parenting could prevent gun violence (Romney 2012).

Donald Trump

President Donald Trump (2017-) entered the Republican primaries in 2015 with all previous policy statements coming as a private citizen. He released the book *The America We Deserve* in 2000, where he stated, "I generally oppose gun control, but I support the ban on assault weapons and I support a slightly longer waiting period to purchase a gun" (Trump and Shiflett, 2000). When asked about this in a primary debate in 2016 Trump was booed and said he did not hold these positions anymore (Trump, 2016). As both a candidate and as President, Trump has proposed removing the *gun-free* label on schools and arming teachers (Hartmann, 2018).[17][18]

During a primary debate in January 2016 Trump said he did not think there were any circumstances where gun sales should be limited. He also said that if there had been guns "on the other side" of certain shootings there would have been fewer killed. He also blamed the problem on mental health issues, and a lack of funding to combat it (Trump 2016).

After the Parkland shooting in February 2018 Trump stated "We're going to do strong background checks. We're going to work on getting the age up to 21 instead of 18. We're getting rid of the bump stocks, and we're going to be focusing very strongly on mental health" (Hartmann, 2018). The NRA came out against upping the age-limit on assault weapons and it has not been proposed in Congress as of February 2019. The Trump administration banned bump stocks, which were used to increase the fire rate of a rifle in the Las Vegas shooting, in December of 2018 (Savage 2018).

Party Platforms

I have analyzed the party platforms of the four eras to find out when gun policy became relevant to the Republican party, and to see if there are discernable patterns that emerge. Party platforms are written at the National Convention during election years. The most important policy driver for party planks are the promises made by the winning candidate during the primaries, but demands from donors, party leaders and activists can play a role in drafting the document (Fagan 2018, p. 951).

[17] "You know what a gun-free zone is to a sicko? That's bait" (Hartmann 2018).
[18] "Look at the possibility of giving concealed guns to gun adept teachers with military or special training experience - only the best" (Ibid).

Gun policy first appeared in a Republican platform in 1968, two months after the GCA was passed in the House. It's not unusual for big events to spur action, as Republicans did not mention abortion in a party platform until three years after it was legalized in *Roe v. Wade* (Flaten 2010). Since 1968, gun policy has been mentioned in every Republican platform.

Table 5.1: The number of gun word mentions in Republican Party platforms, 1948 – 2016

1948	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
0	0	0	0	0	2	3	2	4	1	3	3	5	11	13	13	13	16
Change					+2	+1	-1	+2	-3	+2		+2	+6	+2			+3

Gun words = the key words that identify gun policy as the subject in party platforms. These are "gun(s)," "handgun(s)," "firearm(s)," "(to bear) arms," and "Second Amendment." Source: The American Presidency Project (2018).

The pattern in table 5.1 is clear: The relevance of gun policy has been increasing over time. The biggest jump came in 2000, when gun words were more than doubled from 1996. In order to get a clearer picture, I have grouped the platforms into the four eras:

Table 5.2: Gun words in Republican Party Platforms grouped into eras. Mean.

	1948 – 1968	1972 – 1992	1996 – 2004	2008 – 2016
Gun words	0.33	2.67	9.67	10.67
Change		+2.34	+7	+1

Source: The American Presidency Project (2018).

The increasing emphasis on gun policy becomes clearer when platforms are grouped together. Gun words more than tippled from the second to the third era and had a modest increase in the fourth. The saliency has been highest in the last two eras, which is the last third of the time frame I'm covering, as the two first eras cover six platforms and the two latter cover three each.

Chapter 6: Empirical Evidence on the NRA

This section will present data relevant to hypothesis 1 (H1): *An increased influence of the National Rifle Association caused the Republican Party to adopt more extreme gun policy.*

Lobby groups influence a lot of power in politics, and they do so by gaining allies in the political realm with whom they share policy goals. They use their membership base to apply pressure and resources to support campaigns. They also help allies with costly policy information and political team building. They are integral in the policy-making process, but they don't change many minds – instead, they 'work' natural allies with a vast toolbox of carrots and sticks to achieve their desired goals. The NRA is a powerful such organizations in the United States, and my hypothesis is that they managed to engineer a pro-gun consensus in the Republican party.

This section aims at laying the groundwork for understanding the role played by the NRA in the relevant time-period of this study. I will do so by establishing the following: Which political activities were the NRA engaged in from 1945 to 2018; how did this involvement change over time; how did the NRA involve itself in the political process (in visible and, as much as I can know, invisible ways); and how did the NRA cultivate a member base to advance their goals.

The data will be presented in three categories: 1) Overt political activity. This is the visible and public political support given by the NRA to political parties, politicians, PACs, and campaigns for or against ballot initiatives. It is manifested in statements, endorsements, NRA-PVF grades, political ads, and political donations. 2) Traditional lobbying. Visible lobbying manifested in public pressure for/against legislation and invisible lobbying (from available sources) in the form of behind the scenes lobbying of parties and politicians. 3) Membership cultivation. Building a nation-wide organization by growing the membership base, unifying members around political goals, cultivating members through media, and using members to apply pressure on parties and lawmakers.

Overt Political Activity

Since the 1970s, the NRA has issued grades to politicians running for office. The data on these grades, ranging from A+ to F- is unfortunately limited, as the NRA removed their database, which was previously available to all members, from its website in 2018 (Bump 2018).[19] There exists an independently recorded database of these grades going as far back as 2009, and I will be introducing this data even though it lacks the proper historical context of earlies grades. This database was

[19] An NRA spokesperson responded by saying "I think our enemies were using that" (Bump 2018).

released by *Everytown for Gun Safety*, a rival organization, but I have no reason to doubt the validity of the data, as the NRA hasn't publicly called it into question.

I have not succeeded in acquiring donation data from the NRA prior to 1990, but I have some data from third party observations such as newspaper articles. There is little reason to doubt this data's accuracy, but it is an incomplete source.[20]

1945 – 1968

The NRA did not give grades, endorse candidates, or donate money to PAC's or candidates in this era.

1968 – 1992

The NRA started donating to elections in 1976, and the most it spent on a single congressional race in 1976 was roughly $50,000 (Lytton 2005). They began forming relationships with lawmakers in this way. The NRA uses its relationship with senior members of Congress who chair committees to block hearings and votes on gun control bills, and in turn support their re-election fights (Ibid). During the 1980 primaries, the NRA-PVF spent at least $230,000 to keep Ted Kennedy, a leading gun control advocate in the Senate, from winning the Democratic nomination over President Jimmy Carter (Kohn 1981). During this time period, the NRA was regularly endorsing candidates for office and making donations to their campaigns.[21]

Throughout the 1980s the NRA convinced many state legislatures to pass preemptive gun laws in various states, protecting against possible gun control efforts (Lytton 2005). They also started fighting against ballot measures that would impose gun control. They played a key role in defeating a handgun ban referendum in California in 1982 (Ibid). The referendum was defeated 63-37 after the NRA had spent $5 million on an advertising campaign opposing the measure (Egan 1997).

The NRA also used its resources to punish dissenting allies. In 1980, the NRA-PVF supported the independent candidacy of Bernard Sanders for Congress from Vermont after the Republican incumbent came out in favor of an assault weapons ban (Kristian 2015).

[20] While I cannot secure all relevant data on NRA funding of candidates, PACs and political campaigns for or against referendums, illuminating key events will help paint an accurate picture of the trends of the times.

[21] As an example, they fully endorsed six Senators in 1980, with four of them winning, including Democrat Tom Eagleton of Missouri (Kohn 1981).

The NRA spent $873,493 on the 1990 mid-term elections, giving all this money to PACs. In the election cycle of 1992, the NRA doubled its commitment, giving all but $700 to PACs. They gave 64 percent of their contributions to PACs supporting Republicans in 1990, and 63 percent to Republicans in 1992 (The Center for Responsive Politics, 2018).

1993 – 2004

In 1996, the NRA-PVF had only given $100,000 in soft money to the GOP, but spent millions attacking Bill Clinton (Dao 2000 and Dao 2000).[22] NRA contributions grew in partisanship during this period. While they had only supported Republicans for President, they had backed a significant amount of pro-gun Democrats during the 1970s and 80s. Figure 6-1 shows that this changed in the third era.

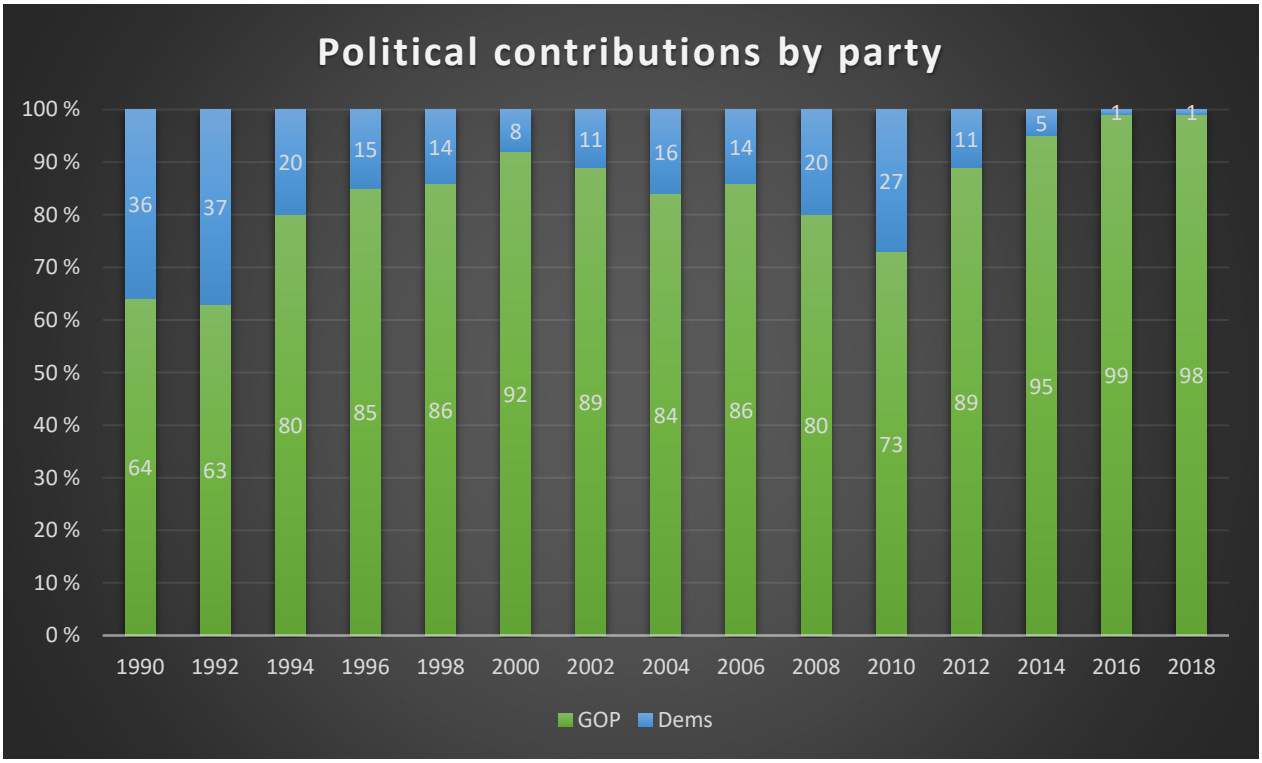


Figure 6-1 shows the percentage of political contributions (hard and soft money) given to the two major parties from 1990 through 2018 (Figure based on data gathered from The Center for Responsive Politics).

During the 1990 and 1992 elections, a little over 60 percent of NRA donations went to Republican candidates. This number grew to 80 percent in 1994, and it has only dropped below 80 once since, when the NRA donated 73 percent of its money to Republicans in 2010. This does not include outside spending, which is money that supports a campaign from the outside, beyond the control of the

[22] "Soft money" describes donated to parties for "party-building" purposes and were used in elections to hide the contributor. It was banned by the McCain-Feingold reform in 2002.

campaign (The Center for Responsive Politics, 2018). As figure 6-2 shows, the NRA spent roughly $2-3 million on each election cycle from 1992 through 2000. Spending increased to over $6 million in 2002, and $9.5 million the following election cycle. The advent of outside spending after 2002 caused the increase in 2003-04.

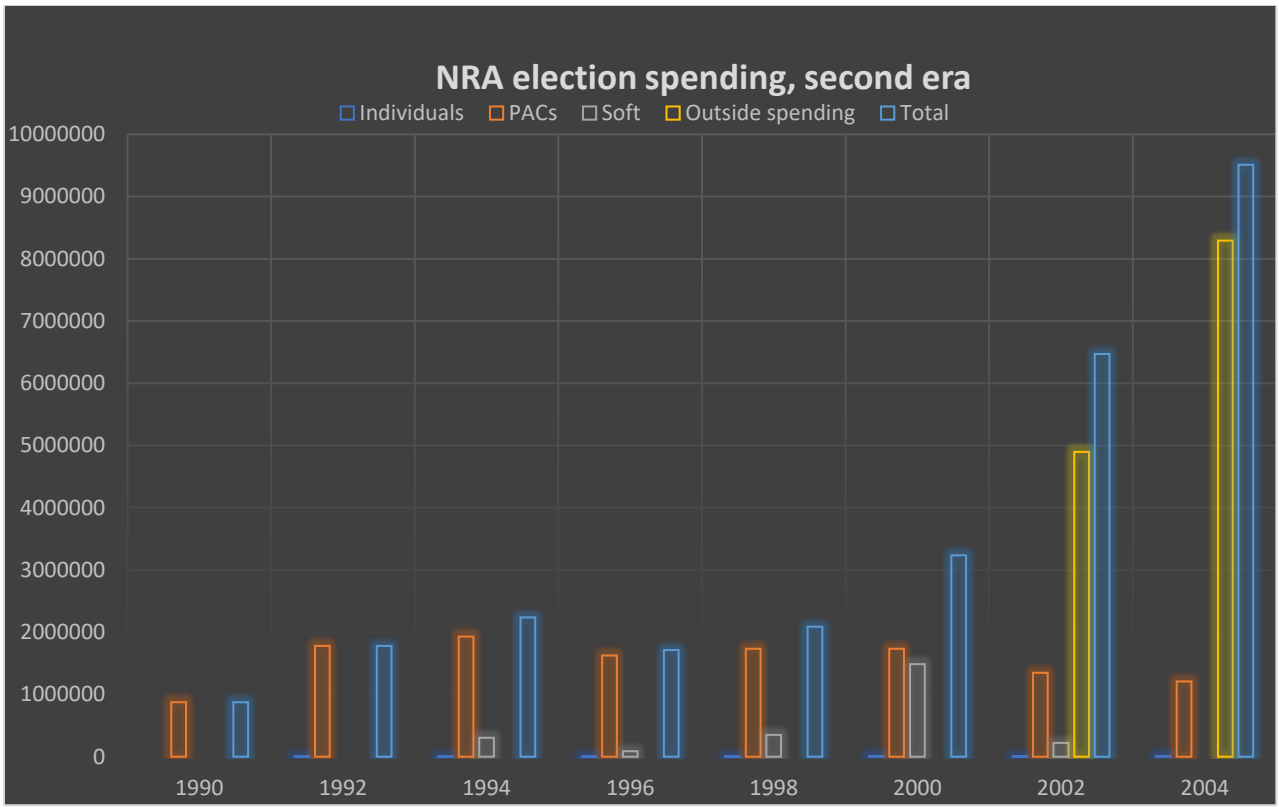


Figure 6-2 shows election spending by the NRA in the third era, plus the two previous election cycles that I have data on (Figure based on data gathered from The Center for Responsive Politics).

The NRA continued to support and oppose local measures in this era. In 1997, it spent $2 million to defeat a proposition in Washington state to mandate trigger locks on all handguns (Horner 2005).

2005 – 2018

NRA contributions in this era were mainly Republican, as seen in figure 6-1. The high point for Democrats was in 2010, when 27 percent of NRA endorsements went to members of their party. This was a year when Republican incumbents did very well, and NRA friendly Democrats were presumably in need of more help than usual.

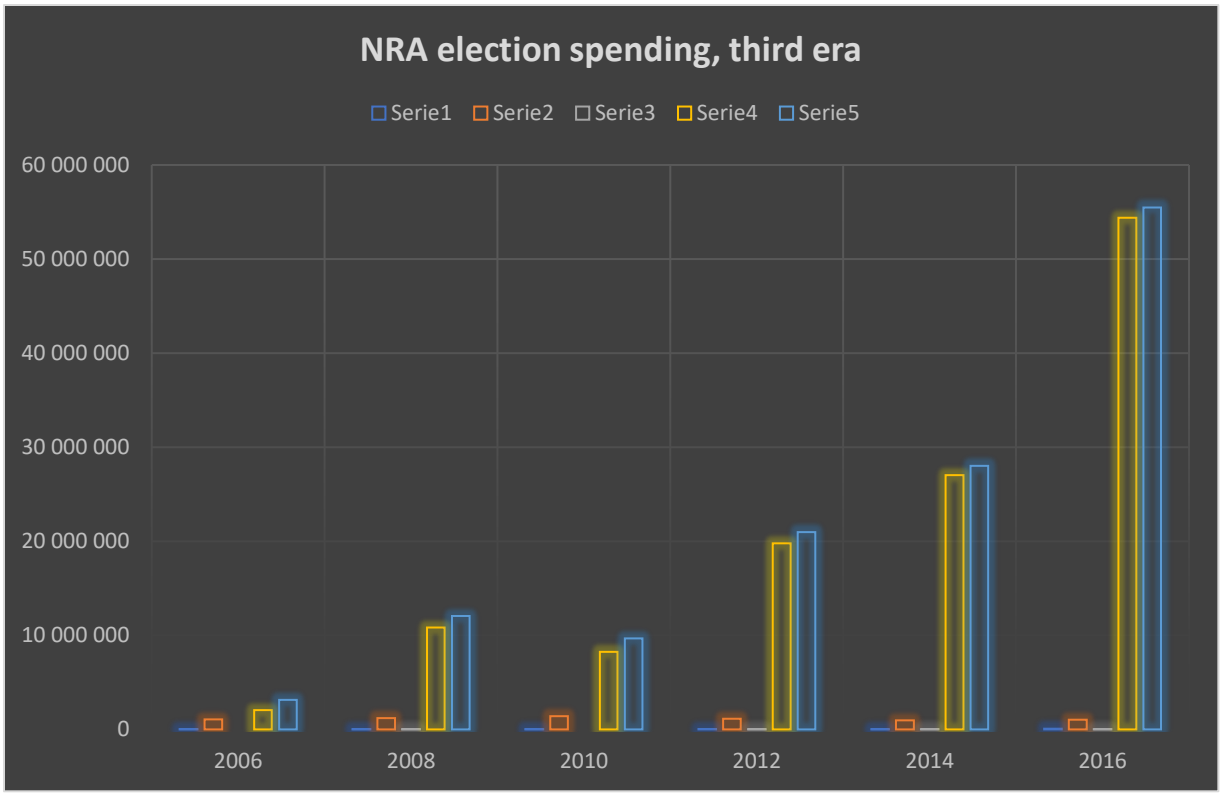


Figure 6-3 shows election spending by the NRA in the last era (Figure based on data gathered from The Center for Responsive Politics).

NRA spending in the last era was higher overall than previously. Donations dropped to $3.1 million in the 2006 mid-terms and stayed in the low single digits. They spent close to $10 million 2008 and 2010. In the three elections after that the NRA spent more than $20 million dollars in each one. $21 million in 2012, $28 million in 2014, and $55 million in 2016. After 2006 more than 80 percent of NRA's election spending went to outside spending.[23]

As gun control measures have failed in Congress, gun control advocates have moved to the states. The NRA also got involved in several local ballot measures in this era but were frequently outspent. In 2014 and 2016 there were three measures trying to remove exceptions for background checks with gun purchases, such as private sales and sales at gun shows. Such a measure won by an 18-point margin in the state of Washington in 2014, with the NRA spending $485,382 in opposition. Gun rights advocates spent a total of $565,835 in opposition, while gun control advocates spent $10.6 million.[24] A similar ballot measure won with 50.45 percent support in Nevada in 2016, after the NRA had spent $6.6 million dollars opposing it. Supporters spent $18.9 million (Ibid). A similar measure failed in Maine in 2016 after getting 48.2 percent of votes with gun control groups outspending the NRA 6:1 (Ibid).

[23] It had been just over half before from 1990 – 2006.
[24] The NRA challenged the law in court and lost (Ballotpedia).

Data on NRA Grades

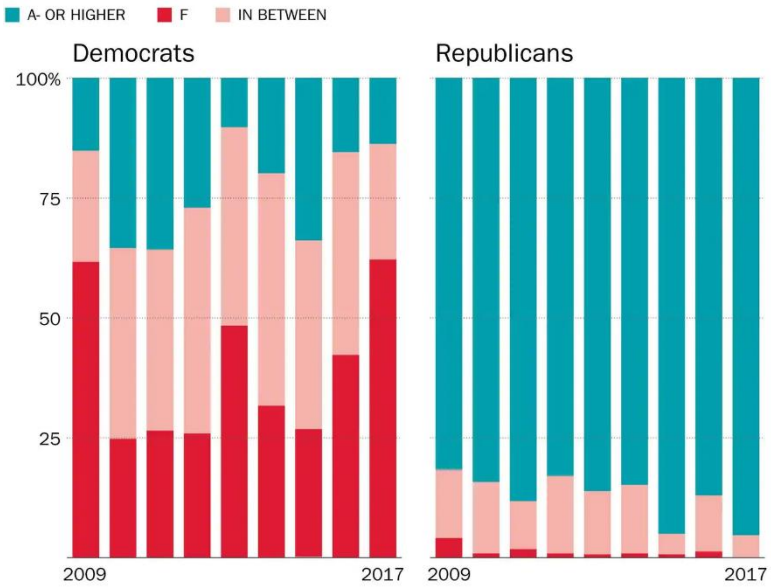


Figure 6-4: Distribution of NRA Grades by year and party, 2009 – 2017 (Everytown for Gun Safety 2018).

Figure 6-4 shows the distribution of NRA grades by party and grade. The right side is the most telling, as it shows that since 2009, more than 75 percent of Republican grades have been A- or higher while the F grades have not eclipsed the single digits.[25] Democratic numbers range from the mid to high 20s up to the high 40s in 2013 and high 50s in 2009 and 2017. 2009, 2013, and 2017 are off-year election cycles where only New Jersey and Virginia hold statewide and local elections, while other states only hold necessary special elections.[26] Therefore, these numbers cannot be used to generalize about the two parties as a whole. Looking at regular election years – 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016 – reveals an increase in F ratings for Democratic candidates. Democratic A grades have also dissipated, going from the low 30s in 2010, to the mid-20s in 2012, and steadily lower over the next two election cycles.

NRA friendly politicians who do not vote in line with expectations will not only see their grade change, they might face similar headlines to the following, which was a ratings correction sent out to Florida members in 2018: “Florida Alert! It’s Time to Name the Betrayer’s Who Voted for Gun Control” (NRA 2018).

[25] The NRA endorses candidates in primaries and general elections in State (State House, State Senate, and statewide elections) and Federal (U.S. House and Senate, President) elections.
[26] Elections where vacancies require special elections to fill empty seats.

Lobbying

1945 – 1968

This was before the NRA-ILA was created, so lobbying was presumably done by the NRA itself. The NRA did lobby during this era, but I have not uncovered any spending data on it. The NRA cooperated with Congress in drafting the GCA and lobbied against undesirable provisions (Carter 2002).

1968 – 1992

President Richard Nixon was decrying the power of the gun lobby in 1972, when he expressed a desire to ban all guns, but added that “the rifle organization will be against it” (Associated Press 2013). In March 1973, aide John Ehrlichman was telling Nixon that gun control was a "loser issue for us." "You've got a highly mobilized lobby," he told the president. "I think what we have to do is carve out a little piece of it, and Saturday night specials, of course, has been our tactic" (Ibid).

The NRA lobbied to eliminate the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) in the first 15 months of the Reagan administration, but changed its mind when federal gun law enforcement was proposed to be handed over to the Secret Service, fearing they would enforce laws more strictly than the ATF (Taylor 1982). It was NRA lobbying that lead FOPA in 1986, which repealed parts of the GCA.

1993 – 2004

The third era was marked by a public more turned off to guns and the NRA than any of the other eras covered here. It is also the era of the strictest gun laws. As shown by Gallup (table 6-1), the public was more skeptical to the NRA during the 1990s and early 2000s than they were in the fourth era.

The Gallup polling shows that the NRA had its weakest standing among the members of the public in the early to mid-90s. This is the same period that the *Brady Bill* and *Federal Assault Weapons Ban of 1994*, the most high-profile gun regulations in all three eras, was passed. A poll from ABC News/Washington Post in 1994 had support for the ban at 80 percent, with 18 percent opposition (ABC News and Washington Post 2015). Support for the ban has slowly decreased over time and the effectiveness of the ban has been called into question (Carter 2002, p. 95).

NRA Favorability

Mar 1993	55% favorable[27]	42% unfavorable[28]	13% no opinion
Jun 1995	42	51	7
Apr 1999	51	50	9
Apr 2000	51	39	10
May 2000	52	39	9
Apr 2005	50	34	6
Dec 2012	54	38	7
Oct 2015	58	37	6

Table 6-1: "What is your overall opinion of the National Rifle Association, also known as the NRA – is it very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable or very unfavorable?" (Gallup 2018).

Jul 1996	20% always/most of the time	70% some of the time/never	10% no opinion
Feb 1999	25	67	8
Dec 2012	35	61	4

Table 6-2: "How often does the NRA reflect your views about guns – always, most of the time, only sometimes or never?" (Ibid).

Stricter gun policy was favored in this era. According to Gallup, the AWB was supported by a majority of Americans in the era and more than 60 percent of the public wanted stricter gun laws – which decreased steadily to 44 percent in 2011 (Jones 2011).[29] A handgun ban was favored by the public in the late 50s and the 60s but has not been favored after 1970 (Ibid).

During the third era, the NRA responded to legislative losses with a nationwide lobbying effort to secure statutory immunity for the gun industry. By 2005, 32 states had passed such legislation (Lytton 2005). These laws vary and give different protections in different states, including immunity from suits for guns that backfire or other types of malfunction, breaches of contract, or guns used nefariously. The PLCAA of 2005 was part of this effort.

[27] "Very favorable" and "mostly favorable" combined
[28] "Very unfavorable" and "mostly unfavorable" combined
[29] A majority of Americans opposed the assault weapons ban from 2007 onwards.

Lobbying Expenditures

The available data on lobbying expenditures is from 1998 through 2017. Data on the NRA's place on the list of lobby groups by money spent starts in 2012. The NRA ranked as the 170th most-spending lobbying group for the 112th Congress (2011-2013), 155th for the 113th and 114th congresses, and 83rd in the 115th Congress (Center for Responsive Politics). This is seen in figure 6-5, measure on the right y-axis.

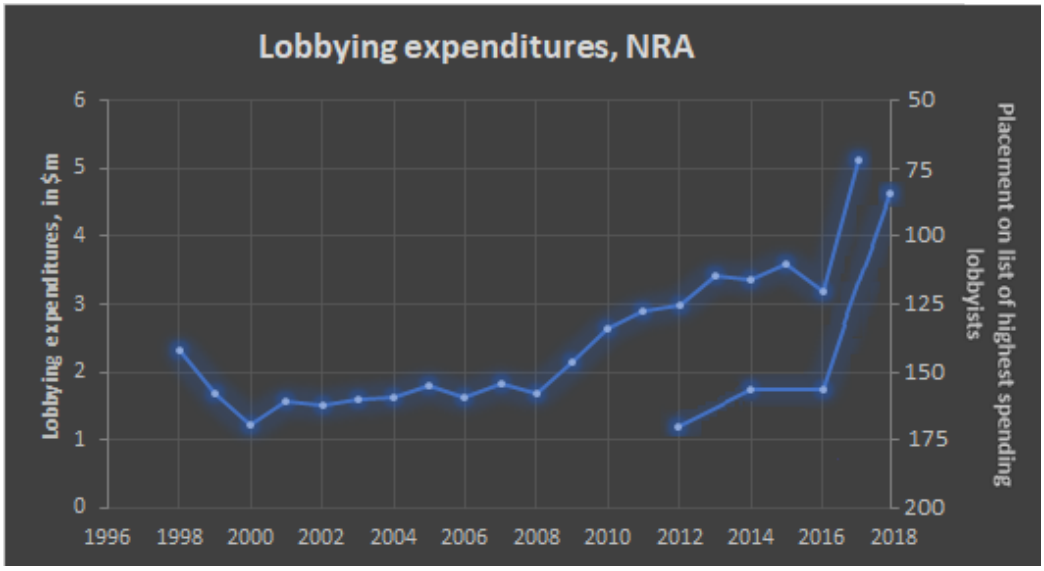


Figure 6-5: Millions of dollars spent annually by the NRA on lobbying on the left and NRA's place on the list of top donors for each election cycle on the right. (Figure based on data gathered from The Center for Responsive Politics).

2005 – 2018

The last era is in many ways a trumped-up version of the one proceeding it. The NRA enjoyed greater public support in the Gallup poll and there were no major gun control bills passed at the national level at this time. As lobbying efforts of the NRA-ILA grew, its lobbying expenditures almost tripled.

Membership Cultivation

As the lobbying arm of the NRA, it is a natural goal for the NRA-ILA to increase its membership, as members are the ones you are representing when dealing with legislators. The NRA does not have a public registry of members, and thus all my mentions of their membership data is garnered from the NRA's self-reported numbers. These numbers are therefore not subject to review. Members are generally more conservative. 77 percent of NRA members in 2017 considered themselves Republicans or leaned towards the Republican party (Parker 2017).

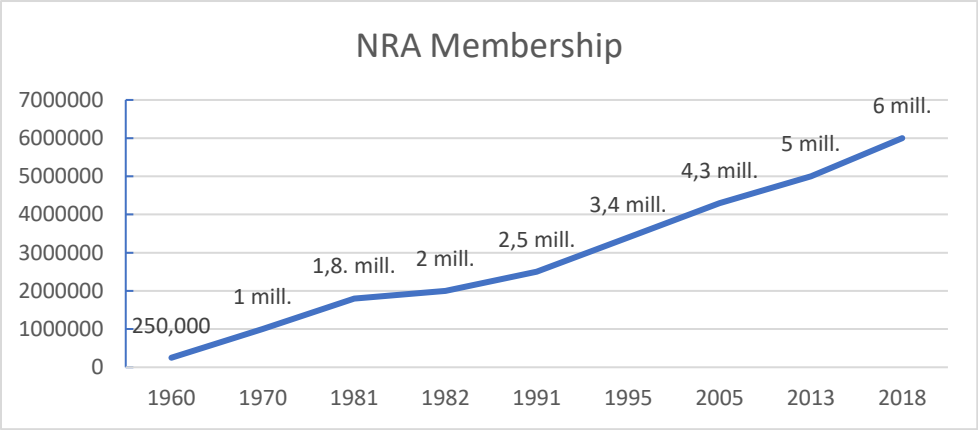


Figure 6-6: NRA Membership over time (Patrick 2010, Kohn 1981, Taylor 1982, Butterfield 1995, Master 2005, Lytton 2005, and Korte & Morefield 2018).

The NRA has grown tremendously in the time covered in this thesis. It had 250,000 members in 1960, which jumped to one million in 1970 and 3.4 million in 1995. At the start of the third era, in 2005, the member base was at 4.3 million, and it surpassed six million in September 2018.[30]

NRA members are active – they often send letters and e-mails to members of Congress, call their offices, picket their local offices and often call in to local radio shows to voice their opposition to elected officials (Lytton 2005). The most active members think that giving up ground on a single, small issue will open the door to wide-spread gun control (Ibid).

In 2013, the NRA worked with conservative pro-gun Democrat Joe Manchin of West Virginia on a bipartisan gun bill. After filling the bill with NRA friendly language, the hard-right *Gun Owners of America* sent a mass email portraying the NRA as working against gun owners. This caused the NRA to pull out, and instead divert the ire of their members to Manchin and other Senators, who saw their phone lines jammed with thousands of calls (Draper 2013).

American Rifleman Editorials

Lacombe (2018) argues that the NRA can mobilize its members in massive numbers due to a long-term cultivation of a common social identity for gun owners. By analyzing editorials of the NRA magazine *American Rifleman* from 1930 to 2008, Lacombe was able to operationalize part of NRA's messaging to its members. He found 66 percent of editorials to have portrayed gun rights as

[30] In the 1980s, an NRA membership cost $15 and included a choice of magazine subscription between *American Rifleman* and *American Hunter* (Kohn 1981). In 2019, membership costs $45.

threatened, while 36 percent called to political action (Lacombe 2018, p. 25). Below, I will be presenting some of his findings, as they are highly relevant to my thesis.

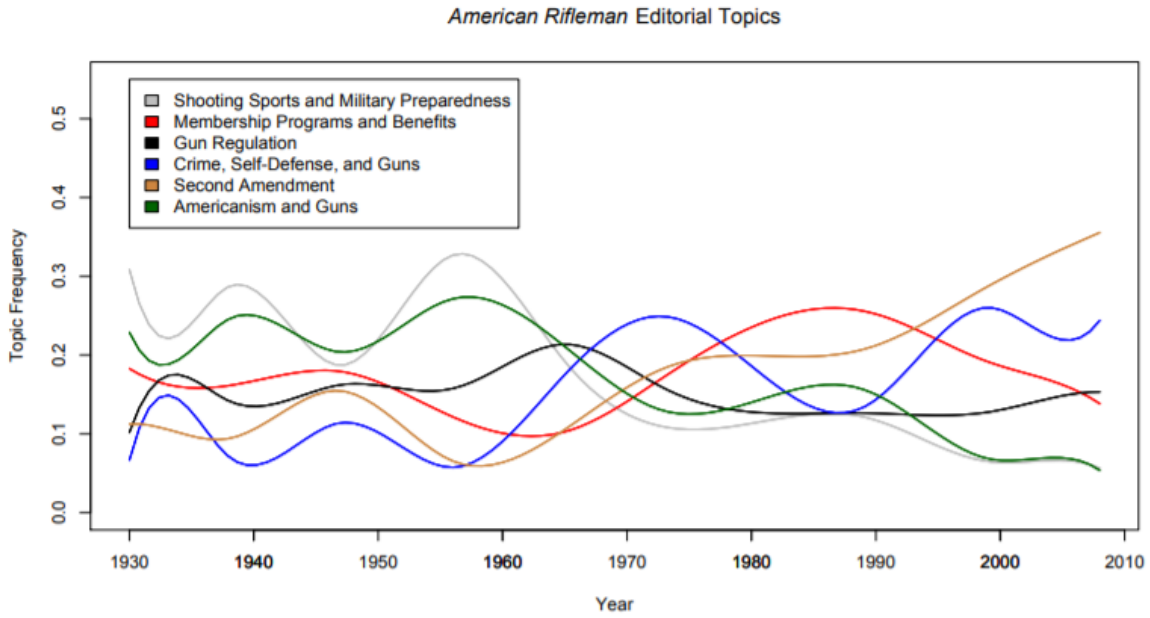


Figure 6-7: Frequency of all topics in American Rifleman editorial, 1930 – 2008 (Lacombe 2018).

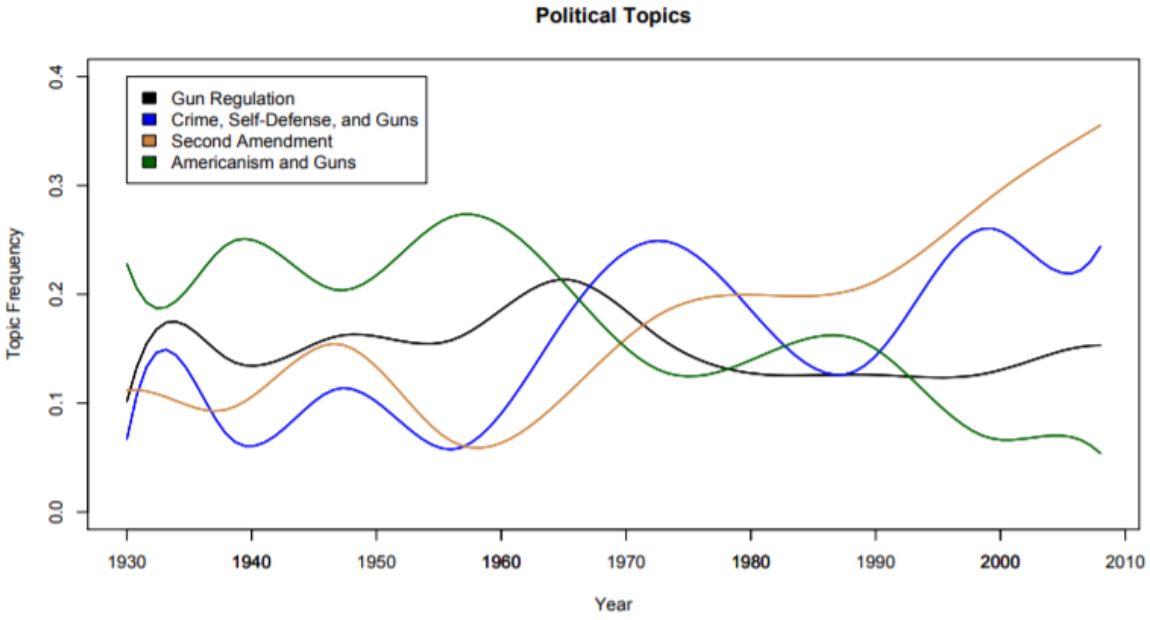


Figure 6-8: Frequency of political topics in American Rifleman editorial, 1930 – 2008 (Lacombe 2018).

1945 – 1968

Shooting Sports and Military Preparedness is the most frequent editorial topic from 1930 to 1945 and it surged in the 1950s. After this it fades and is yet to recover. It likely faded due to a decline in relevance after World War II and the NRA's lessened focus on developing the marksmanship of

young men (Lacombe 2018, p. 41). Other topics became more interesting to the NRA as its formal ties to the government with marksmanship training fell away (Ibid).

The topic *Americanism and guns* describes guns as being central to American history, and as a cherished tradition. It connects gun ownership and recreation and was most heavily employed to defend gun rights in the 1930s and to link guns and freedom to American foreign policy and the country's standing in the world. It was the most common political topic from 1930-1968 (Ibid, p. 45).

1968 – 1992

In 1968, the most common editorial topic was the more general topic *gun regulation*. It grew in prominence with the gun debate following the high-profile assassinations of the 1960s (Lacombe 2018). *Gun regulation* declined in prevalence during the early 70s.

The topic *crime and self-defense* was on the rise during the 60s and early 70s. It was the number one editorial topic during the entire 70s, coinciding with the law and order agenda of Richard Nixon (Ibid). This topic argues that guns are the *solution*, not the cause, of crime, and that gun regulation is an encumbrance on the law-abiding citizen's ability to defend himself. It waned in popularity in the 80s.

The topic *Second Amendment* went from near obscurity in editorials to becoming a relevant topic during the late 60s and the entire 70s. It says that the right to bear arms is there to defend oneself against an abusive government and is therefore a key right. It is "the freedom that makes all other freedoms possible" (Ibid).

1993 – 2004

During the second era, *crime and self-defense* and *Second Amendment* were the two big editorial topics communicated to NRA members. After rising during the first half of the first era and receding in the second half, *crime and self-defense* came back to full strength in the late 90s. This corresponds with the law and order politics of President Bill Clinton and many Republicans (Ibid). After stagnating at a high level during the 80s, Second Amendment-focused editorials exploded in the early 90s. It kept increasing past the year 2000 – when *crime and self-defense* tapered off. *Gun regulation* stabilized as the third most common editorial topics during this era, while *Americanism and guns* tapered off during the 90s, and levelled out at a low level in the early 2000s (Ibid).

2005 – 2008

Lacombe's data does not go past 2008, but still gives insight into the fourth era. During the first four years of the era, *Second Amendment* kept increasing in prominence. In 2008, it featured more heavily in editorials than any topic in the history of *American Rifleman* editorials. *Crime and self-defense* increased slightly and was the second most common topic for these years. *Gun regulation* saw a slight uptick, while *Americanism and guns* fell to its lowest ever point (Ibid).

Chapter 7: Empirical Evidence on Polarization

In this chapter I examine H2: *The polarization of American politics during the outlined period has resulted in the Republican Party adopting more extreme gun politics and explains its policy shift on guns.*

Political science research on two-party systems were long based on the assumption that parties as rational actors would act in accordance with theories of Hotelling and Downs – seeking the middle of a left-right scale in an effort to court voters with single-peaked preferences. As researchers have discovered more and more polarization it has called into question whether parties actually seek the middle ground any more, and convincing evidence has been laid forward to suggest that both parties and voters have diverged. In this section, I will present evidence that polarization has occurred, and test its impact on gun policy votes.

This section is divided into four parts: Institutional polarization, ideological party diversion, roll-call data, and a redistricting and sorting portion. The causality between institutional populational polarization is seemingly circular – did a polarized public cause polarized politics or did polarized politics create a polarized public – so I found it best to look at the two parts separately. Institutional polarization deals with the polarization of institutions, parties, and elected officials, as observed through committee and floor votes as well as ideological scoring. Ideological party diversion looks at ideological comparisons between the two parties over time by DW-NOMINATE scores. Roll-call data looks at floor votes on Senate gun bills in five different Congresses and compares over time. The 'Redistricting and sorting' section accesses the impact of both on elections, and what this tells us about polarization within the electorate.

I will test all these notions to be able to understand the effects of polarization of time, and to be able to assess its effects on gun policy. I was unable to dedicate enough time to gather first-party data from 1945 – 2018 on all four fronts and have thus used the data available to me. The four sections of this chapter must therefore be interpreted cumulatively, not individually, since they function as building blocks to understanding polarization.

Institutional Polarization

A way to test whether elected officials cooperate less with members of the other party is to illuminate how often an opposing party with control of one or more chambers of power cooperates with a sitting President on legislation – or conversely, how often a sitting President cooperates with

the opposing party in this scenario. As shown by Sinclair (2003) in table 7-1, the percentage of congressional bills supported by the President in times of divided government have decreased over time, suggesting less bipartisanship. From 1987 to 1998, the President supported 19 percent of House bills in committee and on the floor – 1/3 as many as in the 1960s.[31] In the Senate, this had dropped by almost half over the same time periods for bills in committee, and 1/4 for bills that received floor votes. The middle period confirms a gradual reduction. Presidential support of bills remained high during times of unified congressional control throughout the three periods studied (Sinclair 2003).

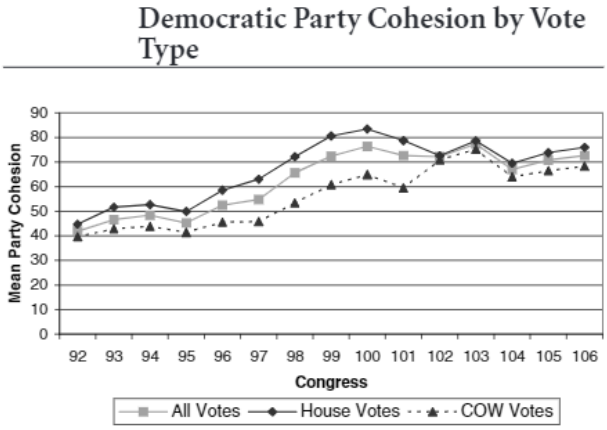
	1961 – 1970	1975 – 1982	1987 – 1998
House committees	57	30	19
House floor votes	61	38	19
Senate committees	44	28	23
Senate floor votes	42	33	31

Table 7-1. Percentage of bills that were in committees and got floor votes that the President supported. Numbers are from periods where the Congress was either completely or partially controlled by the President's opposing party (Data gathered from Sinclair 2003).

Party Cohesion

The Sinclair (2003) data above shows that the opposition party controlling one or two chambers of Congress grew less inclined to support a President of an opposing party over time. This suggests greater party cohesion. Kirkland (2014) found a similar development in citizen ideology. One where increased variance was tied to greater polarization. A polarized citizenry causes greater party cohesion – since elected officials are not expected or demanded to cooperate greatly with the other side – which means fewer members of each party are willing to buck the party line (Ibid, p. 542). The more pressure legislators feel to act in certain way and the longer this pressure lasts, the likelier it is they act in this way. This proves that legislators are affected by their electorate and infers that a shifting electorate would cause a legislator to either conform in some way or be replaced.

[31] I do not have similar data from later on.



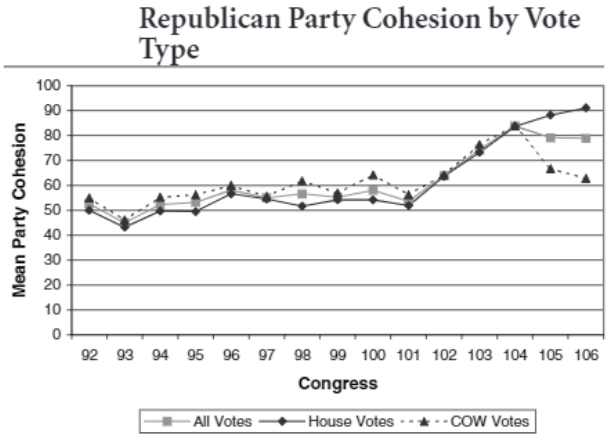


Figure 7-1. Party unity (cohesion) in the House of Representatives on floor votes, committee votes (COW) and all votes, as measured by Roberts and Smith (2003).

As seen in figure 7-1, Democratic unity in the House grew most from the 96th through the 100th Congress. In the 95th Congress (1977-1979), they voted in unity on 50 percent of floor votes and 40 percent of committee votes. These numbers started to grow in the 96th Congress (1979 – 1981) and kept growing until reaching its peak during the 100th Congress (1987-1989). At the end of this decade they voted cohesively on more than 80 percent of floor votes and more than 60 percent of committee votes, averaging greater than 75 percent cohesion.

Republicans remained steadily at 50-60 percent cohesion from the 1970s through the 101st Congress (1989-1991). Republican cohesion started growing during the early 90s, which is the same time gun control was being discussed seriously in Congress, leading to the Brady Bill 1993 and the Assault Weapons Ban in 1994. They grew to over 80 percent cohesion during the 104th Congress (1995-1997), and the average cohesion in the early 2000s was at 80 percent.

Ideological Party Diversion

The literature consensus that institutional polarization has taken place bears out in the data presented below. Figures 7-2 and 7-3 show the ideological means of both parties on a liberal-conservative axis, again measured by DW-NOMINATE scores. The y-axis shows the DW-NOMINATE scores of individual lawmakers. DW-NOMINATE assigns a score between -1.0 and 1.0, with higher scores meaning more conservative and lower more liberal. These are based on roll-call votes from the U.S. Congress. It is necessary to include data on the Democratic party, as measuring polarization without two poles makes no sense. The literature led me to include Southern and Northern

Democrats, as understanding the ideological differences between the party's two main, regional factions has been used to partly explain the evolution of polarization. Figures 7-2 to 7-5 give credence to the notion that Southern Democrats were more conservative than the party average, as their mean DW-NOMINATE score has been higher than the party average in every Congress post-WWII.

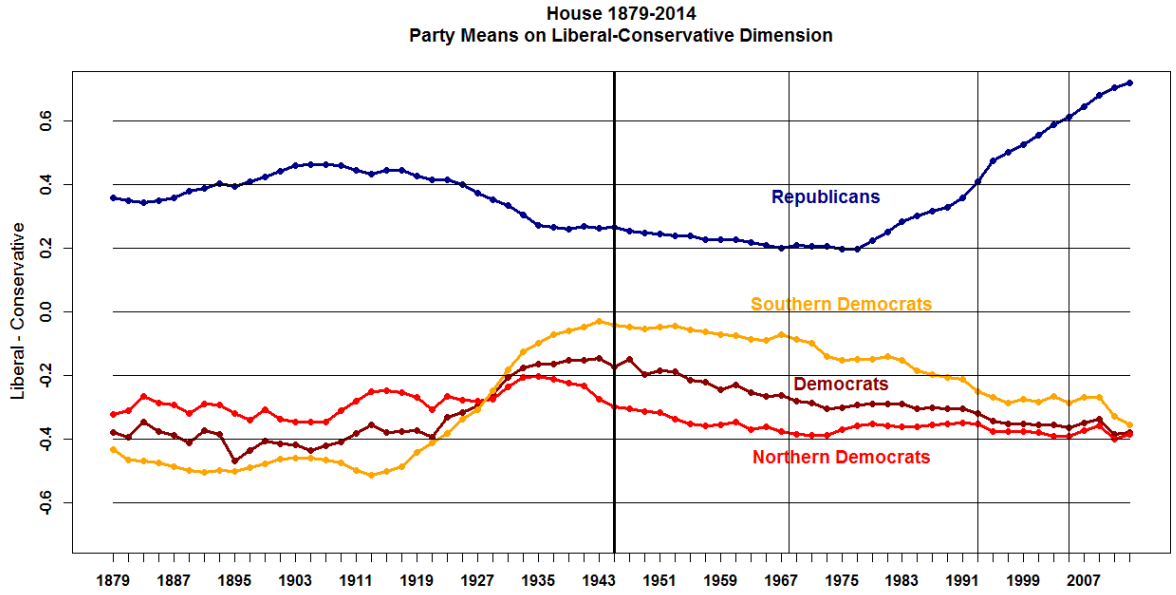


Figure 7-2 shows the mean ideological scores of both parties in the House of Representatives from 1879 to 2011, including regional factions of the Democratic party, as measured by the DW-NOMINATE score (Poole et.al. 2015). The vertical lines represent the different eras identified by me.

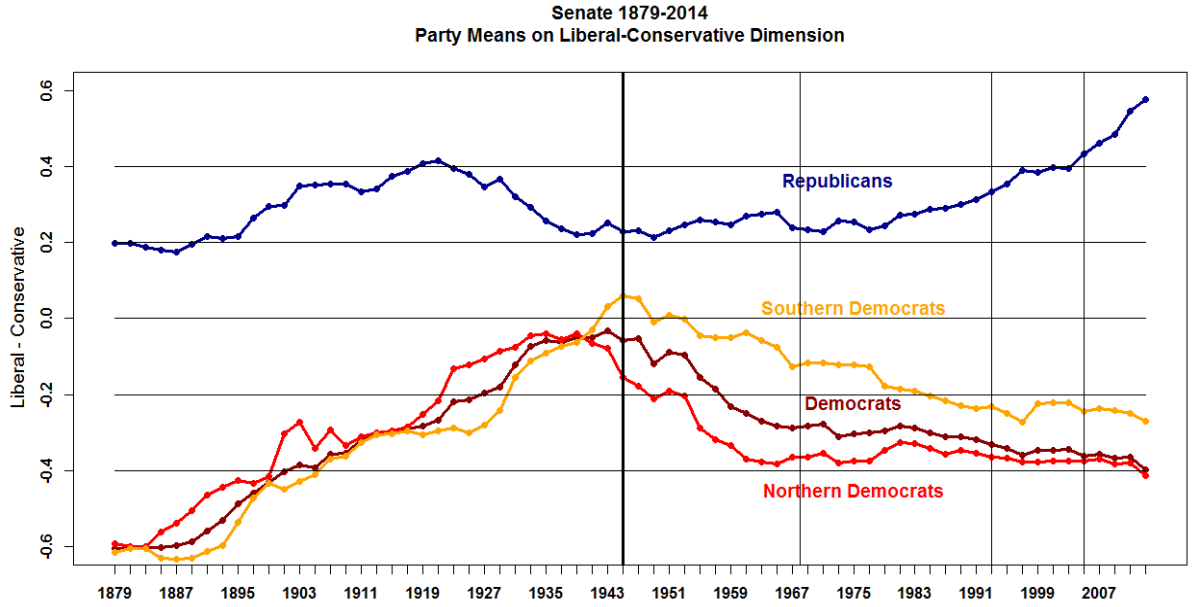


Figure 7-3 gives the same type of data as figure 7-2, but for the Senate (Poole et.al. 2015).

At the start of the first era in 1945, Southern Democrats in the Senate had an average DW-NOMINATE score of above 0.0, meaning they were averaging slightly on the conservative side. The party was very moderate. The average Democrat was placed in the middle of the party's Northern and Southern wing during the 1940s and first half of the 50s, and after this the Northern wing started weighing more heaving on the party score – indicating greater numbers. In the last era, Southern Democrats are far removed from the average Democrat, with a ~0.15 higher DW-NOMINATE score. The average score is almost identical to the Northern Democrat score in the last two eras. The development has been similar in the House. This is a sign of a reduction in Southern Democrats.

Figures 7-4 and 7-5 help visualize the ideological distance between Democrats and Republicans over time. In figure 7-4, the difference is very small in 1945, and the growing ideological distance over time is easily observed. In the Senate, the distance between the Democrats and Republicans is just over 0.2 when World War II ends. It is just over 0.5 in 1968, around 0.65 in 1993, and at almost 1.0 in 2011. The distance in the House is usually comparable to the Senate and has been greater since the mid-1980s. From 1945 to 2011, it went from ~0.45 to ~1.1.

Figure 7-3 also visualizes the ideological jump that the GOP took from the Tea Party. It shows how the party made its largest jump from one Congress to the next from the congresses before and directly after the Tea Party wave in 2010.

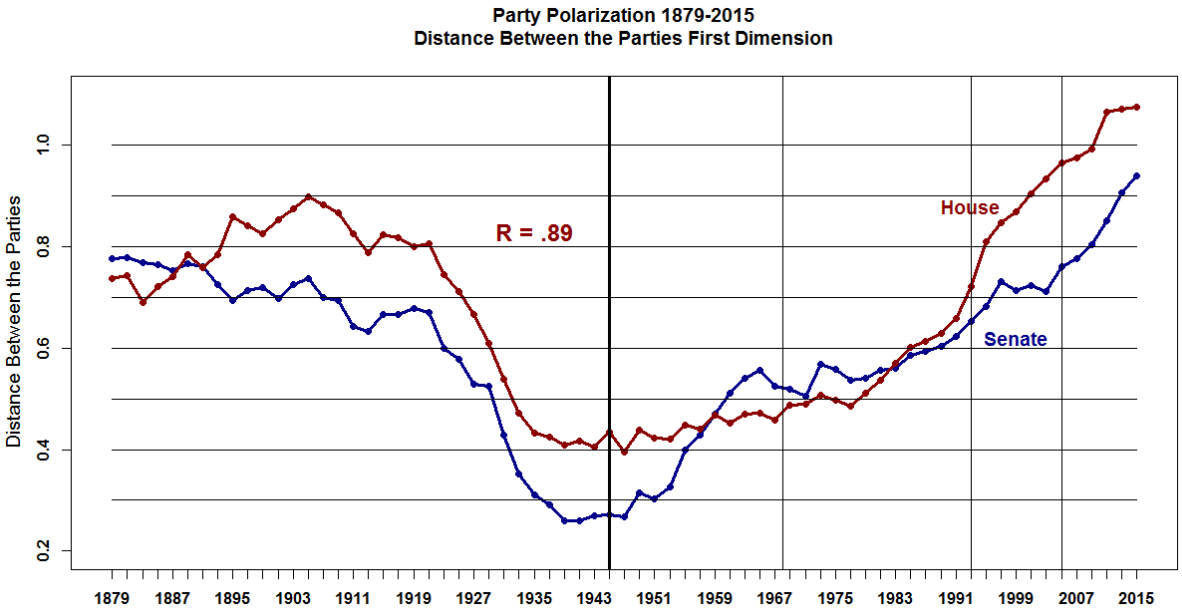


Figure 7-4 shows the ideological distance between party means in the House and Senate from 1879 to 2014, using DW-NOMINATE scores (Poole et.al. 2015).

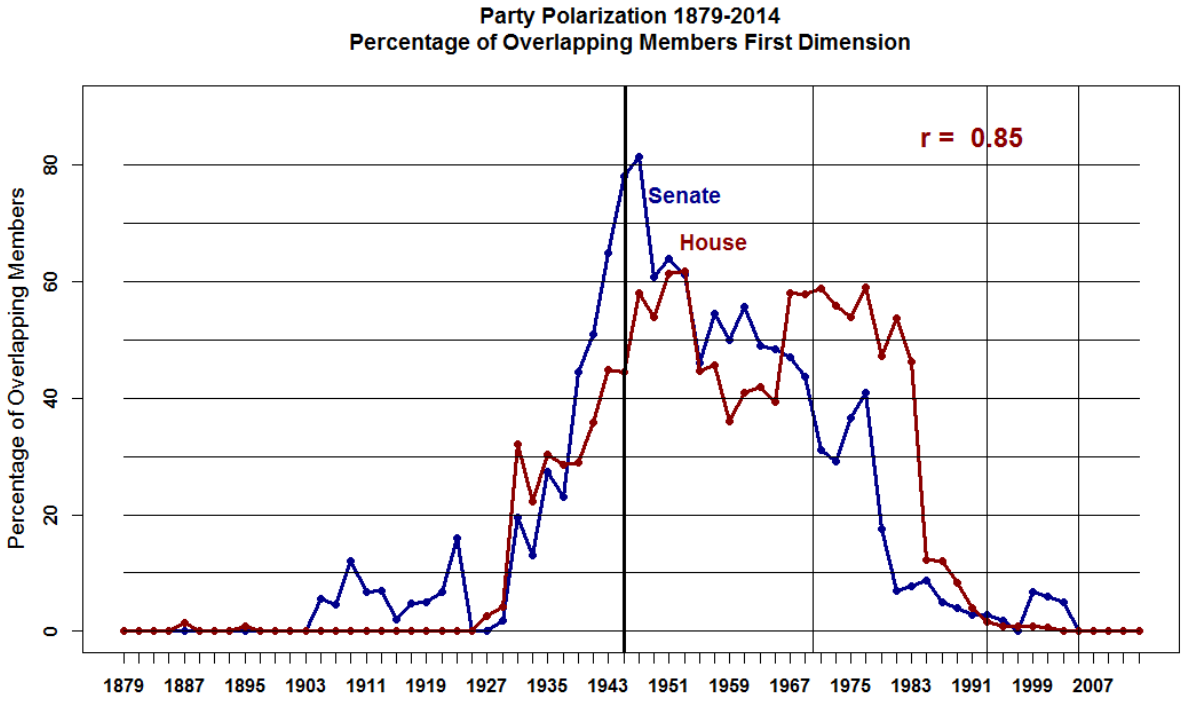


Figure 7-5 shows the percentage of ideologically overlapping members in both houses of Congress between 1879 and 2014, using DW-NOMINATE scores (Poole et.al. 2015).

Figure 7-4 illustrates visually how the two parties have diverged from each other. The distance between the two parties in the Senate roughly doubled (from ~0.3 to just over 0.6) from 1945 to 1989, while growing rapidly (to almost 1.0 in 2014) in the two latter eras. In the House, it grew from a little over 0.4 to more than 0.6 from 1945 to 1989. The rapid polarization started in the mid to late 80s according to Poole et.al. (2015). By 2014 the distance was at ~1.1 – more than half of the ideological span covered by the DW-NOMINATE scoring system.

Figure 7-5 shows a dramatic reduction in ideological overlap over time. Overlap being when the most conservative Democrat is further to the right than the most liberal Republican. Figure 7-5 can't tell us which party caused what change, but this becomes clear when seeing it in relation to figures 7-2 and 7-3 do. These figures show that Senate Democrats moved to the left in the two decades following World War II and then slowly became more liberal up until the mid-90s, when they mostly stagnated. In the House, the trendline is the same but in a more gradual manner. There was next to no ideological movement from House Democrats during the Clinton years, while the Republican House caucus moved almost .2 to the right on the DW-NOMINATE. In contrast, there was very little ideological movement from Republicans in Congress from 1945 to 1980, with the move to the right only starting in the 80s and accelerating significantly in the House in the third era before exploded in both chambers in the fourth era.

Roll-Call Data

Now that I have presented data on general polarization it is time to move more specifically to data on gun bills. To do this I will be using roll-call data from gun votes. I do not have roll-call data from the GCA, but I have used data all relevant Senate votes since then.

The bill S 2507 was introduced in the Senate in 1971 to amend the GCA by banning the sale of any firearms other than shotguns and rifles by federally licensed dealers (Congressional Quarterly 1972). It also targeted domestically produced *Saturday Night Specials*. It passed the Senate in 1972 but never made it out of committee in the House (Ibid). The gun rights supporters were able to add two amendments in their favor. One removed recordkeeping requirements for ammunition, and the other allowed long gun transfers across state lines through family members. The bill was passed by a 68-28 vote with bipartisan support. Democrats voted 38-11 and Republicans 30-14 in favor.

There were a series of votes on proposed amendments from both parties, and I have gathered and analyzed nine votes to see how different factions voted. These are eight amendment votes and the vote on final passage. The amendments ranged from expanding gun control, weakening the GCA, to weakening the main bill. Having nine votes, varying in scope, impact and level of bipartisan support gives me the chance of to take the temperature on guns in the 92nd Congress with a good degree of accuracy. Figure 7-6 shows by what percentage Democrats and Republicans supported gun control in all votes. Senators from both parties are split between those representing urban and rural states, and Democrats are split this and Northern and Southern Senators.

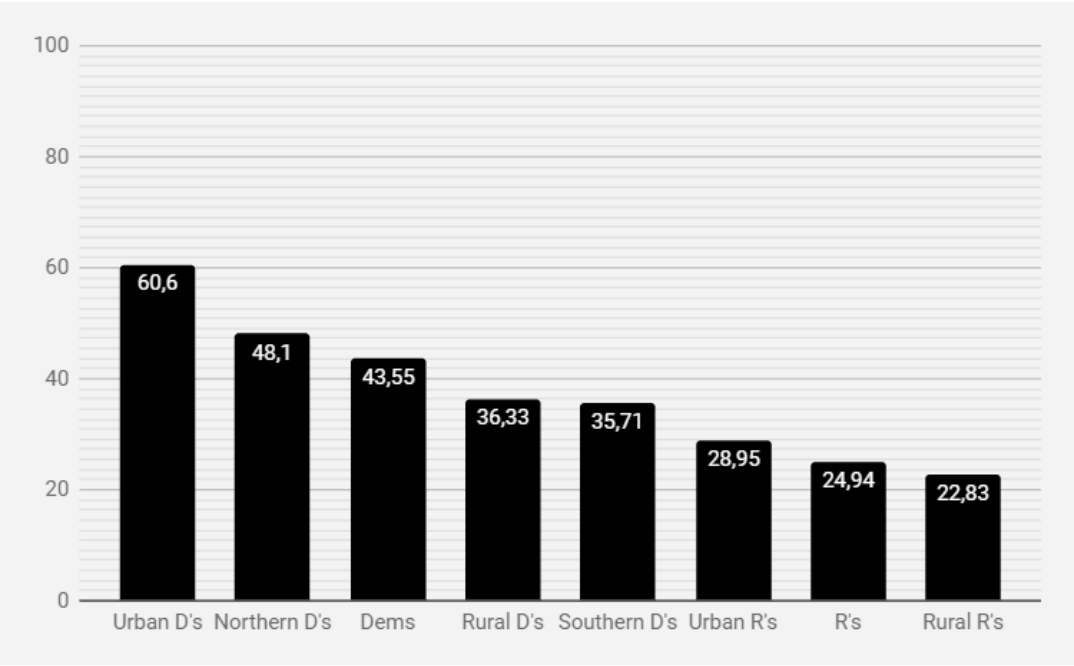


Figure 7-6: Percentage of votes either supporting greater gun control or defending existing gun control on S 2507 in 1972, based on amendment and passage votes (Congressional Quarterly 1972).

The results from figure 7-6 demonstrate that Republicans were less supportive of gun control than Democrats and that rural Senators were less supportive than their urban colleagues. It also shows that gun control was not massively popular in either party, with urban Democrats being the only group to support it more than half of the time.

In 1985, FOPA passed the Senate with 79 votes for and 15 against. 30 Democrats voted for the bill, with 13 voting against. Only two GOP Senators voted against. Northern Democrats voted 18-13 for the bill, and Southern Democrats 12-0.

The Brady Bill was passed by a margin of 63-36 in the Senate and 238-189 in the House in 1993. Democrats voted 47-8 in favor in the Senate, and Republicans 16-28 against. In the House, Democrats voted 184-69 in favor and Republicans 54-119. The *Assault Weapons Ban of 1994* was passed with the support of 46 Democrats and 10 Republicans. Six of the eight Democrats who voted against the bill were from rural states, while two of the 10 Republican supporters were from urban states. The small n of 10 urban Republicans make these numbers hard to rely on, but they're still worth noting. The *Brady Bill* and the AWB are coded as one in figure 7-7.

PLCAA saw only four GOP defections in the House and two in the Senate, while Democrats had 15 supporters from 45 senators, and 59 from 206 House members (US Senate and House records, 2005). Lastly, there is the *Assault Weapons Ban of 2013* where the Feinstein amendment to ban assault weapons and the Manchin-Toomey compromise were two of seven amendments proposed in the Senate after Sandy Hook. Four were Democratic gun control proposals while three were Republican efforts to liberalize gun regulations. All seven fail to get the 60 votes necessary to avoid being filibustered.

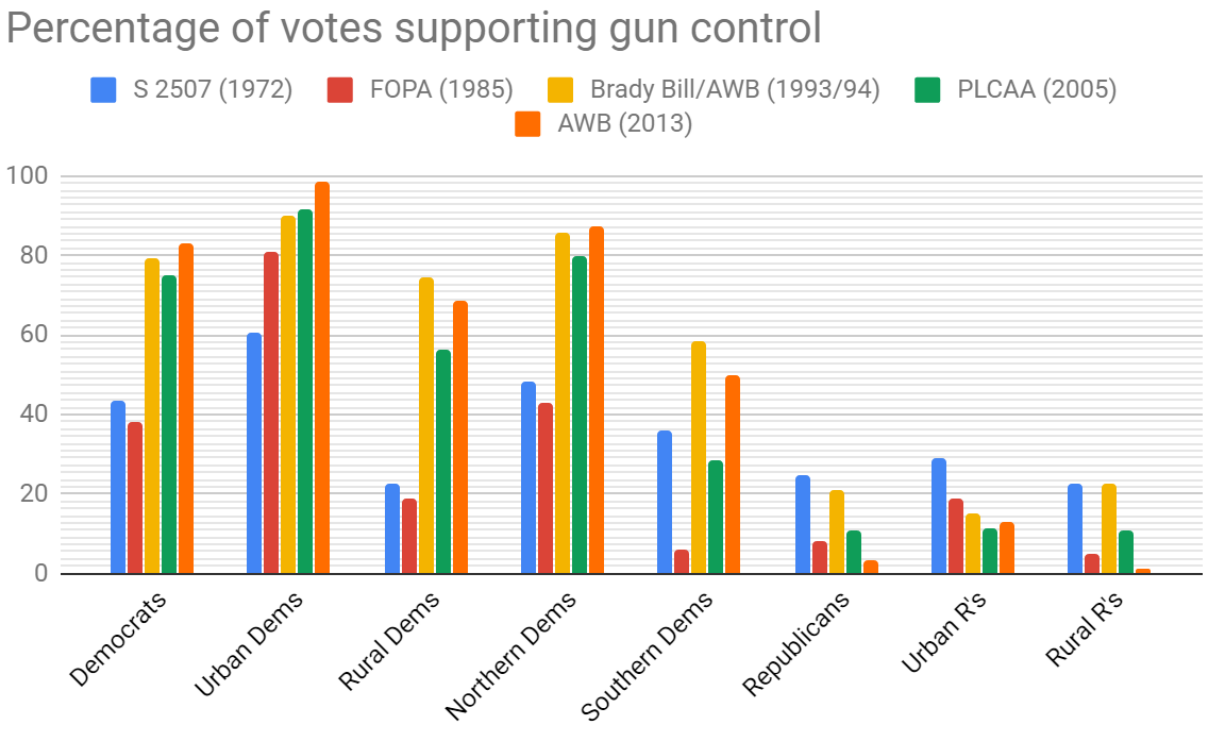


Figure 7-7: How often different groups of Senators voted for gun control in six different Congresses (Data gathered from Congressional Quarterly, Senate, and House Clerk).

Figure 7-7 shows how votes went on the most significant gun policy bills of the last five decades. S 2507 has already been explained and visualized in figure 7-6 and is seen in blue in figure 7-7. The tabulations include all relevant votes.[32]

The figure shows all Democratic groups moving left on gun policy over time. While both the urban/rural and Northern/Southern splits existed from the get-go, rural and Southern Democrats have trended left along with their urban and Northern colleagues on gun votes. Support for gun control among Democrats was much higher in the third and fourth eras than in the second era. I do not have voting data for the first era.[33]

The two first bills in figure 7-7 were not as controversial as the others. Banning Saturday night specials, which was included in S 2507, was supported by President Nixon and received 'yay' votes from 31 of 48 Republican Senators. The Republican FOPA was not as controversial as the Democratic proposals and was supported overwhelmingly by rural and Southern Democrats. The PLCAA was also not as controversial as some of the others.

[32] Amendments; cloture; final passage.
[33] Roll call votes were not done electronically until 1973, so acquiring data from before then is not easy.

A quarter of Republicans supported S 2507 in 1972, while a fifth of Republicans supported the next Democratic push for gun control in the early 90s. Republican efforts to deregulate gun laws received roughly 90 percent support within the party in 1985 and 2005. In 2013, however, only 3.5 percent of Republican votes – 11 of 315 individual votes – supported gun control.

There was a big reduction in urban Republicans in the Senate in the time period covered in figure 7-7: There were 18 of them in 1972, 13 in 1985, and 10 or nine after that. Urban Democrats went from 16 in '72 and 15 in '85 to 22, 24 and 27 after that. The same happened with Southern Democrats, of which there were only six left in 2013, after there had been 17 in 1972 and 13 in 1985 and 1994. The low point for Southern Democrats was in 2005, when there were only four of them in the Senate.

Redistricting and Sorting

This section deals with the polarization of the electorate. As discussed in the theory and literature chapter, redistricting holds that electoral polarization has been forced upon the people through gerrymandering, while self-sorting claims that people voting with their feet has resulted in an electoral polarization.

Proving the potential efficiency of gerrymandering is not difficult. There is a free redistricting tool online that allows users to create their own districts, and some have drawn over 2,500 by hand to illustrate how they can be manipulated – and how they can be drawn fairly (Bradlee 2018, Wasserman et.al. 2018). Gerrymandering is theoretically possible in 42 states, but it has not happened in all.[34] A way to test the extent to which gerrymandering *has* affected districts is by examining when districts moved in and out of the *swing district* category. Swing districts are categorized as those with a PVI of D+5 to R+5. By this measure, there are 71 swing districts in the U.S. House, as of the court ordered Pennsylvania redistricting in February 2018 (Wasserman 2018).[35] When the Cook Political Report started issuing PVI data in 1997 there were 164 swing districts – more than Democratic or Republican districts alone (Ibid).

Figure 7-8 shows safe and swing seats over time, with intervals for elections and redistricting. The data goes back to 1996. Not including data from earlier than 1996 is acceptable, as the literature does not make notable claims to gerrymandering having caused electoral polarization before the

[34] It is not possible to gerrymander the six states with only one congressional district, and out of the states with two congressional districts, Idaho and Hawaii are too heavily favored by one party to be gerrymandered in any meaningful way (Wasserman et.al. 2018).

[35] PVI stands for Partisan Voting Index and is a measurement system invented by the Cook Political Report. It measures the partisanship of a congressional district or state relative to the past two elections for President.

mid-90s. It is apparent from figure 7-8 that the big shifts in swing districts were not caused by redistricting. Since 1996, 17 of the 92 districts that have moved out of the swing category were drawn out – the rest moved there naturally. Dave Wasserman (2018) from the Cook Political Report has noted that this is "more evidence voters are choosing sides with their feet" and that "in the 2016 election, 78 percent of Democratic-leaning seats grew even more Democratic and 65 percent of Republican-leaning seats grew even more Republican."

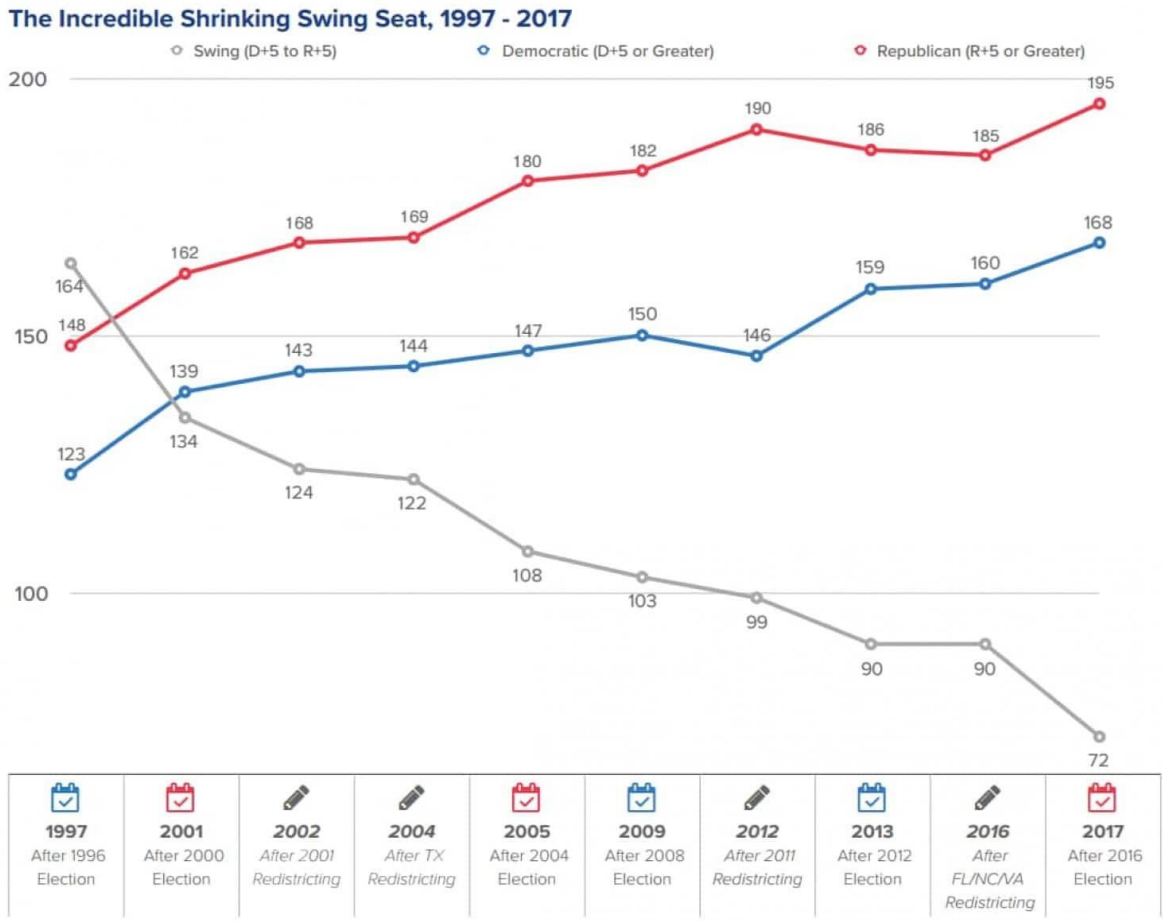


Figure 7-8: Y-axis: The amount of U.S. House districts in the lean Democratic, lean Republican, or swing categories over time. As measure by PVI. X-axis: Elections and times of redistricting (Wasserman 2018).

As shown in figure 7-8, most districts have moved out of the swing category after elections, while redistricting has not cause much of a change (Wasserman 2018). When districts change naturally from election to election it suggests that the same area has changed ideologically over time.

Bishop (2009) and others who consider self-sorting an important factor in explaining polarization have concluded that urban areas have become more Democratic and less Republican from liberals moving into cities and conservatives moving out of them. They claim the opposite has happened in rural areas. Figure 7-7 touches on this issue. If self-sorting has occurred, I would expect Democrats to have replaced Republicans in urban states, and the opposite for rural states. I would also expect

support for gun control by urban Senators to grow over time, with rural Senators becoming less likely to support gun control. Since all Southern states except Florida are rural, I expect Southern Senators to have acted similarly to rural ones, with Northern Senators being more mixed.[36]

Republicans did replace many Democrats in more rural states and also saw to a reduction in Southern Democrats. In urban states, Democratic Senators increased their support for gun control with every new bill in figure 7-7. This group both started and ended with the highest support for gun control. Urban Republicans were six points more likely to support gun control than their rural counterparts in 1972 and was the group voting most often with Democrats in every case except 1993/94, when rural Republicans were 3.82 percentage points more supportive of gun control than their urban colleagues. As expected, rural Republicans' support for gun control generally decreased over time, but rural Democrats were much more likely to support gun control in the two last eras than before that. Their support more than tripled to 74,24 percent in 1993/94 but stayed in the 50s and 60s after that. By the fourth era there was almost no support for gun control from Republican Senators.

[36] After the 2010 census 16 Northern states had a mostly urban population, while 21 were mostly rural.

Chapter 8: Empirical Evidence on Republican Presidential Primaries

This chapter will examine H3: *Reforming the presidential nominating process by democratizing the primary system resulted in more ideologically extreme Republican nominees, which in turn explains the Republican shift on gun policy.*

The policy preferences of voters and grassroots activists is a fuel on which a party can run. Therefore, changing the nominating process to give voters more power could have been powerful enough to change the policy preferences of the entire party. This will be true if Presidential primary voters and activists wanted a liberalization of gun laws and were able to create this change by nominating Presidential candidates that fit this preference more closely. If this process has caused a boom in extreme/pro-gun candidates, then it will be fruitful to look this way for answers.

If there was an activist grassroot movement whose energy was only captured by the NRA and conservative Republicans at first, limiting the ability of party bosses to keep such forces at bay might have brought activist gun policy in to the mainstream of the Republican party. This implies a correlation between being pro-gun and being conservatives, so that the further right you are the higher the chance of you supporting gun rights.

It is also possible that Presidential nominations serve as a platform for politicians to push their agenda on the voters. If the causality runs the other way, then a top-down track could be how gun policy has shifted. Presidential primaries will nonetheless demonstrate what types of candidates are accepted within the mainstream tent of a major party, and therefore give a representation on which gun policies are preferred – or accepted within the debate.[37] Are candidates taking their gun preferences to the voters, or are the voters dictating to candidates which gun policies are palatable to them? Answering this question will go a long way in affirming or denying *H3*.

Mapping Presidential Candidates by Ideology

Some notion of how Republican primaries have developed can be garnered from DIME, the *Dataset on Ideology, Money in Politics, and Elections*, by Adam Bonica (2016) of Stanford. DIME calculates a CFScore of ideology based on political donations, of which the dataset has millions. It calculates the ideology of donors by linking their donations to candidates and then provides ideological scores

[37] Since politicians are rational actors it is reasonable to assume they will not take positions out of the mainstream of accepted views within the party.

where greater than 0 is more conservative and lower than 0 is more liberal. It uses donation data going back to 1979.

The advantage of this dataset is that the activity of candidates and contributors often span multiple election cycles, making across-time comparisons possible. CFScores do change over time, and a score might be end up differently from where it started by the end of a campaign. Mitt Romney, for instance, started the 2012 primary with a score of 0.88 after the 2008 primary, and competed in the 2012 general election with a 1.18 score. A change from left of the average primary candidate, to the right half. A disadvantage of DIME is that if a candidate comes back after a long absence, previous campaign donations might not be useful if they are too old to capture newer policy positions.[38] The scores in figure 8-1 are primary, not general election, scores.

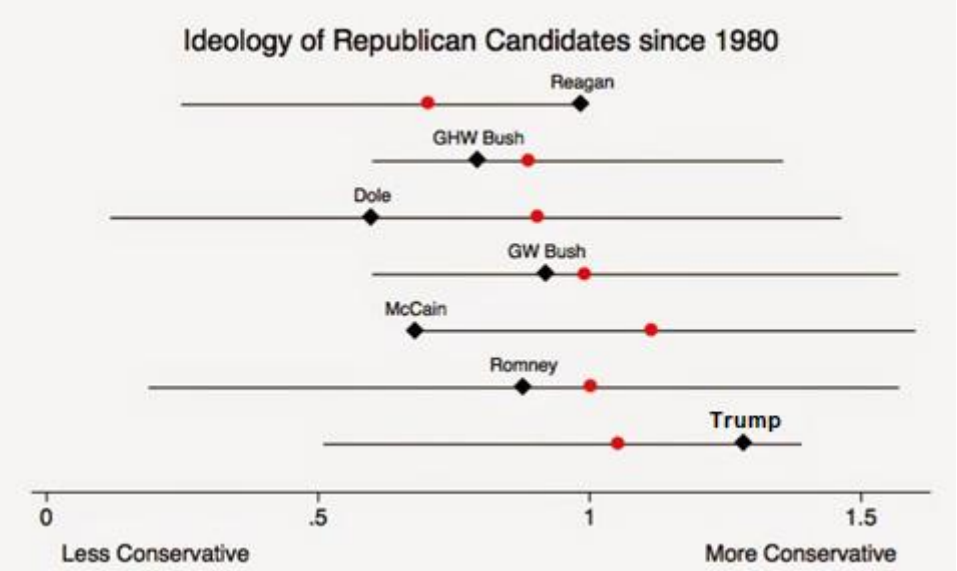


Figure 8-1: Candidate ideology in Republican primaries from 1980 – 2016, with all primaries with sitting Presidents seeking re-nomination (1992, 2004) excluded (Bonica 2016).

In figure 8-1, the X-axis tracks ideology on the conservative side of a liberal-conservative axis continuum. The horizontal lines represent the ideological span of candidates, black diamonds represent the winning candidates, while the red dots are the average candidate ideology. except for 2016. The 1996 primaries saw the most moderate candidate compete for the nomination, while the 2000 primaries included the most conservative. Very conservative candidates have become commonplace, while moderate candidates close to a 0.0 score are rare. Generally, the field has moved to the right since 1980. Figure 8-1 does not tell us what happened before 1980, but we do know that Reagan and Ford were the only candidates in 1976.[39]

[38] The DIME scale does not have an end point and CFScores are relative to one another.
[39] Therefore, 1976 would not dramatically change the interpretations.

The red dots in figure 8-1 show the average ideology rating of the entire field of candidates in a given year. Ronald Reagan (1980) is the only nominee until 2016 to have been more conservative than the average candidate. The average ideology score for candidates has trended rightwards, becoming ~0.3 more conservative than the average in 1980, which translates into almost 1.5 times as conservative. 2012 was the only year with a more moderate average than the competitive primary before it.

Winning candidates being more moderate than the average complies with the party decides theory of Cohen et.al. (2008). The rightward shift in candidate averages was consistent from 1988 to 2008, with the biggest jump being from 2000 to 2008. The Congressional shift right happened in the early to mid-1990s but is most evident in Presidential primaries in 2000 and 2008 – the centrist tail had dropped off in both (but returned in 2012). The data for the 2016 primary does not include all candidates and is therefore limited in scope.

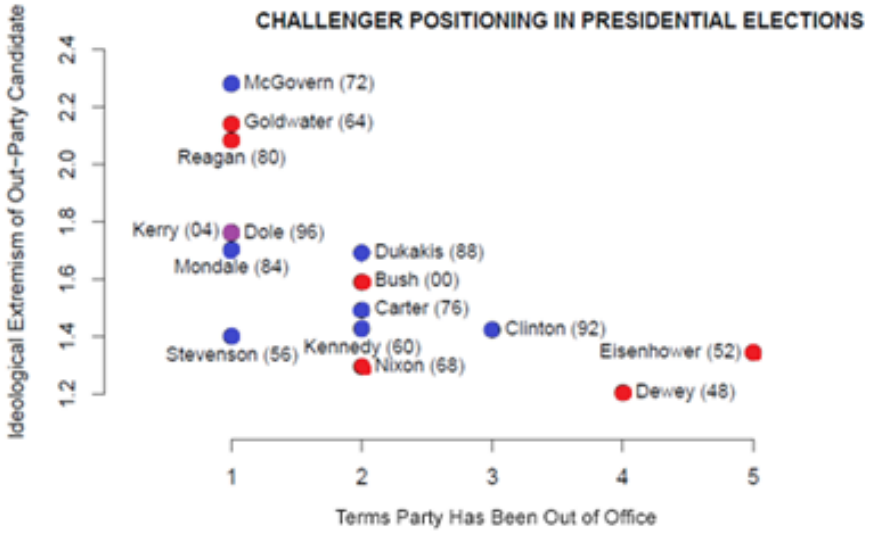


Figure 8-2. The Party Decides (Cohen et.al. 2008). Red: Republican. Blue: Democrat. Purple: Overlap between members of different parties.

Figure 8-2 is lifted from Cohen et.al. (2008) and shows ideology of Presidential candidates and terms the party has been out of office. The graph demonstrates that for each election that a party loses its nominees tend to get more centrist. This comports with their theory of party leadership influencing the primary process and putting a heavy emphasis on electability.[40]

[40] The more losses one experiences in a row, the more heavily moderation and presumed electability are weighed.

Using DW-NOMINATE Scores to Broaden the Field of Vision

Estimating the ideological placement of all the biggest national Republicans of the last 70 years is very difficult, especially in a manner that is comparable over time. I have the CFScores for those who have been in Congress past 1980 and DW-NOMINATE scores for everyone who's ever been in Congress. Many candidates (and President's) have not been in Congress, so it is difficult to place enough candidates to compare all primaries since 1948. I do have figure 8-2 from Cohen et.al (2008) to add some additional context. Those who have served as President have received DW-NOMINATE scores based on the congressional bills they supported as POTUS.[41]

1945 – 1968

Republicans in the years following World War II were led by moderates. Thomas E. Dewey (R-New York), a Governor who was never in Congress, was a centrist according to figure 8-2. He was the Republican nominee for President in both 1944 and 1948. Dwight D. Eisenhower accrued the DW-NOMINATE score of 0.302 while President and is also a moderate in figure 8-2. Richard Nixon had a DW-NOMINATE score of 0.167 while in Congress from 1947 to 1953 and was the party's loosing nominee in 1960. In 1964, the conservative Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Arizona) won the nomination with a DW-NOMINATE score of 0.656, which made him the most conservative Senator in the early 60s. Goldwater held a CFScore of 1.033 based on his brief time in the Senate past 1978, but it is not guaranteed he would have had a similar score if donations from around the time of his Presidential run were used. Goldwater is known to have moderated himself in his later years (Grove 1994).

1968 – 1992

Nixon must have moved to the right after retiring from Congress to become Vice President in 1953 with a DW-NOMINATE score of 0.167 – lowest of all post-Goldwater nominees, because when he governed as President from 1969 – 1974, he had a score of 0.563. The same can be said for Gerald Ford, who governed as President with a 0.538 score, after scoring 0.291 during his tenure in Congress from 1949 – 1973. Cohen's (2008) placement of Nixon matches his congressional DW-NOMINATE score much better, as it places him a tick more moderate than Eisenhower. Unfortunately, Cohen has no ideological assessment of Ford.

[41] A DW-NOMINATE score has not yet been issued for Donald Trump.

Ronald Reagan has one of the most extreme ideological scores of his time. His DW-NOMINATE score as President was 0.706 and his CFscore was almost as high as Goldwater's. George H.W. Bush had a DW-NOMINATE score of 0.538 after succeeding Reagan as President. This was quite the change for Bush, who had a score of 0.208 while serving in the House of Representatives from 1967 to 1971.

1993 – 2005

During the Presidency of Bill Clinton, the most prominent Republicans were Next Gingrich and Bob Dole. Gingrich held a DW-NOMINATE score of 0.377 and a CFScore of 1.171 while in Congress. Dole scored 0.322 and 0.599. George W. Bush served as President with a DW-NOMINATE score of 0.920.

2005 – 2018

During his more than 30 years in Congress, John McCain held a DW-NOMINATE score of 0.381, very similar to that of Newt Gingrich. As Romney never served in Congress or as President, he never held a DW-NOMINATE score. Paul Ryan, his running mate and later Speaker of the House (2015 – 2019) held a DW-NOMINATE score of 0.556, second highest in table 8.1. Donald Trump accrued a CFscore of 1.29 during the 2016 campaign, putting him furthest to the right on this barometer in table 8.1.

	CFScore	DW-NOMINATE, Congress	DW-NOMINATE, POTUS
Eisenhower			0.302
Goldwater	1.033	0.656	
Nixon		0.167	0.563
Ford		0.291	0.538
Reagan	0.985		0.706
Bush	0.795	0.208	0.580
Gingrich	*1.171*	*0.377*	
Dole	0.599	0.322	
Bush	0.920		0.723
McCain	0.675	0.381	
Romney	0.878		
Ryan	*1.074*	*0.556*	
Trump	1.290		

Table 8-1: The ideological scores of prominent Republicans after World War II, with everyone except those in italics having been the Republican nominee for President at some point (Poole et.al. 2015, Bonica 2016).

The Outcome of Reform

There are significant holes in the data presented in figure 8-1, as I cannot tell how many candidates are running in each wing of the party, nor the support they garnered. One extreme candidate can push the whole primary to the right by extending the horizontal line. An example is Alan Keyes, the fringe social conservative who ran for the nomination in 2000 without winning a single state or more than six delegates (The Green Papers 2000).

Still, figure 8-1 does show how the party consistently chose candidates that were within the ideological establishment, and not fringe, most of the time. The average candidate has become more conservative since 1980, but the average nominee has not. To illuminate figure 8-1 further I will be looking briefly into all post-World War II nominees to see if any of them were outside what one would expect from the premise of how parties decide on candidates set forth in *The Party Decides* (Cohen et.al. 2008). All primaries classified as outliers will be treated as individual cases to be reviewed.

In 1948, Thomas Dewey, the most centrist nominee in figure 8-2, was nominated. He was a favorite of the establishment and known as an 'East Coast moderate' (McLaughlin 2018). He had won the nomination four years earlier and subsequently lost to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This was not an outlier nomination. Neither was the nomination of Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952, a moderate whom both parties had attempted to win over after World War II (Friedersdorf 2018). Both men got their heaviest challenge from Ohio Senator Robert Taft, a leader of the small-government, non-interventionist Republicans at the time (Kenny 2011). In 1960, Vice President Richard Nixon won the nomination with wide support from the party and little opposition in the primaries (Kalb 2015).

1964 saw Senator Barry Goldwater, a leader in the conservative movement, win the nomination (Cohen et.al. 2008, p. 42). Goldwater competed against the moderate Nelson Rockefeller. As Goldwater was the most conservative Senator at the time[42] this election is an outlier and will be scrutinized later. In 1968, Nixon again won the nomination. He was the establishment choice, with Ronald Reagan running in the conservative lane, and Rockefeller as the moderate (kalb 2015).

In post-reform 1976, Republicans held an all-time high 28 primaries and caucuses. The sitting President Gerald Ford won the nomination by a very small margin over former California Governor Ronald Reagan, who ran as a conservative outsider (Cohen et.al. 2008, p. 42). Although the party decided on an establishment candidate, I classify this as an outlier primary for two reasons. One, even though he had never been elected, it is unusual for a sitting President to be challenged as

[42] Based on DW-NOMINATE scores from the voteview dataset (Poole et.al. 2015).

heavily as Ford was. This was both the first Republican presidential primary after the reform and the last example of a contested convention.[43]

The 1980 election is another outlier, as figure 8-1 shows that the most conservative candidate in the field was nominated. That candidate was of course Reagan, who had built his name recognition and stature within the party since running for the first time in 1968 (Cohen et.al. 2008, p. 137). Reagan beat out the more moderate George Bush and John Connally[44] across 51 primaries and caucuses. It was also the first primary with elections in nearly all states (Ibid).

The establishment candidates would win the three last Republican primaries of the 20th Century. Vice President and long-time party insider George H.W. Bush won the nomination in both 1988 and 1992. After a few spirited contests in early states in 1988 the party coalesced behind Bush over Bob Dole, who was slightly to his right, but within the main stream of the party. He was challenged as President by the conservative Pat Buchanan in 1992 but won every primary and caucus (Greenfield 2016).[45] In 1996 it was Dole who won, after having been 'in line' for the nomination while serving in congressional leadership (CNN Library 2018).

In 2000, George W. Bush shored up support among elected Republicans very quickly and received more endorsements than any Republican since at least 1980 (Bycoffe 2016). Even though he ran as a *Washington Outsider* he won with establishment support (Chicago Tribune 2000).

In 2008, it took John McCain a few primary wins to gain the support of the party over moderate Mitt Romney and conservative Mike Huckabee (Bycoffe 2016). He was boosted by long congressional experience and having been 'next in-line' after losing the 2000 nomination (Kilgore 2009). He was not an ideological outsider, so this was not an outlier election. The same happened to Mitt Romney, who won the nomination in 2012 after coming close four years earlier (Kalb 2015). Romney had almost two-thirds of all endorsement points before the Iowa caucus and won with the support of the party establishment (Bycoffe 2016).[46]

In 2016, Donald Trump became the first nominee of a major party with no political or military experience (Crockett 2017). Trump was difficult to pinpoint ideologically but was perceived by voters as less conservative than past candidates (McCarthy 2016). He ran as an outsider dead set on blowing up business as usual and won as an underdog. It was an outlier election because of the

[43] Where the nominee has not been decided (for all practical purposes) in advance of the convention roll-call.
[44] Former Democratic Governor of Texas.
[45] Pat Buchanan represented a style of conservatism similar to that of Donald Trump and helped keep the Goldwater/Reagan brand of conservatism alive during the Bush and Clinton years.
[46] Endorsement points is a scoring system developed by FiveThirtyEight where endorsements from current officials are counted as follows: Representatives in the House, 1 point each; Senators, 5 points; Governors, 10 points (Bycoffe 2016).

establishments total disregard for Trump during the primaries. It is hard to picture Trump winning in the pre-reform era, as it was his popularity at the polls that allowed him to win the nomination. Trump was the choice of voters wanting an outsider, and without a singular establishment candidate to oppose him, his 45.9 percent of votes was enough. He was helped by the prevalence of winner-take-all selections of delegates in many states (Silver 2016). This was also the first time since Reagan that Republicans nominated a candidate who, based on DIME, was more conservative than the average candidate.

1980, 2008, and 2016 are the only Republican primaries since 1980 where no candidate had received more than half of all endorsement points before the crucial Iowa caucuses (Bycoffe 2016). Trump reached more than half of endorsements after the national convention, McCain shortly after Super Tuesday,[47] and Reagan towards the end of the primary season (Bycoffe 2016). McCain was not outside the mainstream of the party and convinced party leaders to support him after winning over voters in early primary states. I see this as a spirited competition, and not the sign of an outlier primary.

Outliers

Figure 8-1 shows that the most conservative candidates usually don't win nominations, and that even when the average candidate has become more conservative, very conservative candidates are not usually winning nominations. To understand this better, 1964, 1976, 1980, and 2016 will be assessed further.

1964

In 1964, Goldwater accumulated 38.3 percent of the vote from 16 primaries and caucuses, of which he won seven (Kalb 2015). In other words, he did not have overwhelming support, and his candidacy was controversial within the party (New York Times, 1964). Moderate Republicans split their votes between several candidates. Nelson Rockefeller won two states and 22.1 percent of votes, while U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, Henrik Cabot Lodge, Jr., won three states as a write-in candidate.[48] In other primaries, "favorite sons" of different states ran to block Goldwater (Congressional Quarterly 1967). Rockefeller's recent divorce and re-marriage was speculated to have cost him much support (New York Times 1964). Goldwater won because moderates never coalesced around a single

[47] A Tuesday in early March where many states hold primaries and caucuses.
[48] He never officially campaigned.

candidate, and because the winner-take-all nature of many primaries gave him added delegates at the convention (Ibid). There was a large movement opposing Goldwater, but it was not able to channel that passion in to support that would make one candidate strong enough to defeat him.

1976

This was the first primary after the reform had opened up the process to more primaries and caucuses, which meant more pledged delegates at the convention.[49] Reagan forced a contested convention on the back of solid support from the conservative wing of the party and more primaries and caucuses to acquire delegates from (Wang-Breal 2016). Ford did win the nomination, which was to be expected. However, he worked hard for it. Ford's campaign manager Dick Cheney later stated, "there literally was nothing we wouldn't do for an uncommitted delegate" and unpledged Mississippi delegates were invited to sit at the same table as Queen Elizabeth II during a White House dinner in an effort to win their support (Ibid).

It was not just the democratization that made a Reagan nomination plausible in 1976, there was a growing conservative movement in the party.[50] This is evident from Ford dropping Rockefeller from the ticket due to "the growing strength of the GOP's right wing (Mieczkowski 2005).[51] [52] Rockefeller was replaced with Gerald Ford, who was center-right within the party (Ibid). As of 2016, Ford is the last incumbent president to not have his incumbent Vice President as his running mate.

1980

It was not strange for Reagan to win the nomination in 1980 on account of him having finished second four years earlier – rather, it was strange to have the most conservative candidate in the race finish first. Even though Reagan won most of the early primaries he struggled to gain support from main stream Republican (who clung on to three moderate candidates[53]) – and did not reach 50 percent of endorsement points until two months after Iowa (Bycoffe 2016).

[49] A pledged delegate is a delegate who's vote on the first ballot it tied to the result of his/her state.
[50] This had always been present (as evidenced by Goldwater). Reagan got 45.9 percent of votes.
[51] The right wing was not fond of the Vice President with the square glasses.
[52] Ford later called this decision "one of the few cowardly things I did in my life" (Mieczkowski 2005)
[53] George Bush, James Baker, and John Connally.

Reagan had built support from conservative voters and operatives for over a decade, and the lack of a charismatic counterpoint to his left gave him a comfortable win. The party's voters seemed ready for a more conservative candidate in 1980 after dipping its toe in the water four years earlier.

2016

In 2016, Donald Trump won the Republican nomination despite significant opposition from the party establishment (O'Keefe 2016). His success in primaries and caucuses was sufficient to keep party insider from denying him the nomination. When all other candidates had dropped out, Trump was still fourth in the endorsement count (Bycoffe 2016). In this aspect, the choice of Trump seems like a hard-to-explain aborition.

In both pre- and post-reform years, party leadership have usually been able to find candidates that pleased the establishment, and extreme candidates usually don't get nominated (Bishop 2009). This often meant moderate candidates were chosen. The outlier primaries demonstrate that there is a significant conservative strain within the party.[54] Both their popularity, the electoral openness of democratization (50+ primaries), and many winner-take-all primaries meant that these voters (while only as pluralities) could not be stopped in 1980 and 2016. In most elections, voters have found the more traditional options sufficient.

1976 as a Single Case

In order to understand the immediate consequences of the primary reform I will look even closer at the 1976 primary. Reagan's base was in the South and his native West. He won a majority of Southern and Western primaries. Ford had his base in his native Midwest and in the North East – the latter being known for the moderate *Rockefeller Republicans* (Spencer 2016). Ford won all eight northeastern primaries and two-thirds in the Midwest (Kalb 2015).

[54] One I have identified as growing in the latter eras in the previous chapter.

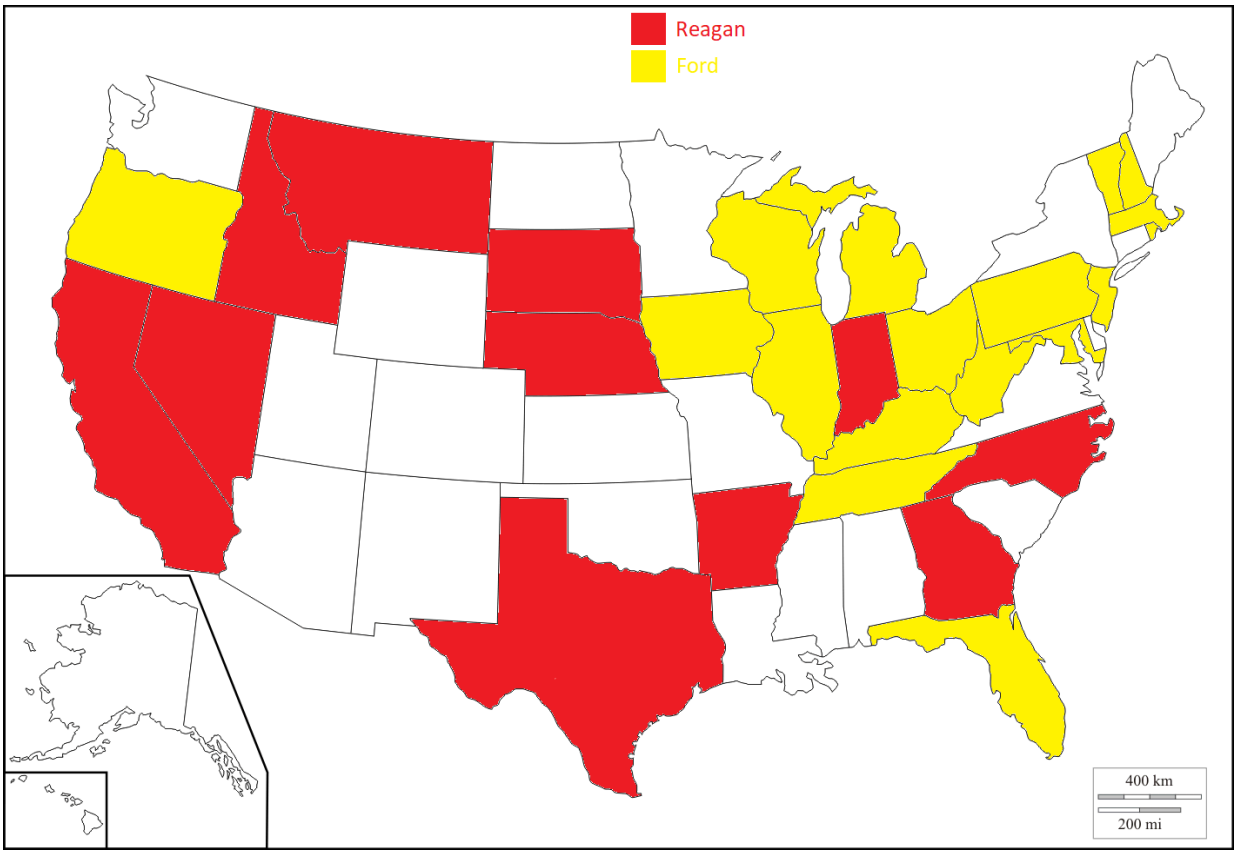


Illustration 8-1: Results of the 28 primaries and caucuses for the Republican nomination in 1976 (Kalb 2015). Illustration of my own making.

Reagan and his conservative coalition won the hearts of the grassroots and rode to victory in 1980 – when he routed Bush in the South and West while staying competitive in the North East and Midwest (see illustration A2 in appendix). This helped move the Republican party from the North and Midwest to the more conservative South and West. Before this, Goldwater (Arizona) and Nixon (California) were the only Post-World War II candidates not living in New England or the Midwest to win the nomination (Wang-Breal 2016). In fact, in all Republican primaries[55] from 1900 – 1972 they were the only Republican Presidential nominees not from the North East or Midwest. Not a single Southerner was nominated to lead a Republican ticket in this period.

[55] Excluding those were sitting Presidents were re-nominated (1912, 1932, 1956, 1972)

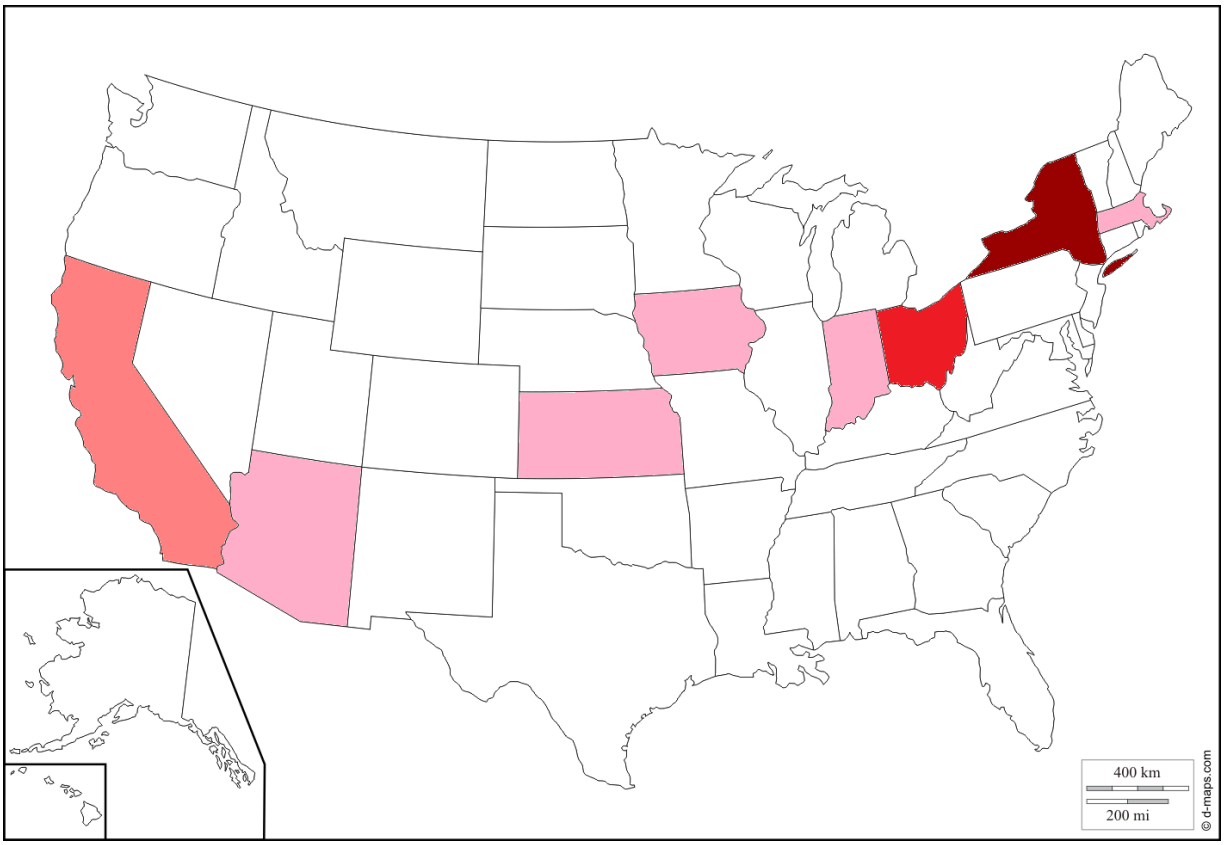


Illustration 8-2. Home states of GOP nominees for President, 1900 – 1972. Pink: 1 nominee; salmon: 2; red: 3; burgundy: 5 (Kalb 2015). Illustration of my own making.

From 1976 on, nominees were spread out evenly between all four regions, moving the center of gravity away from the North East and Midwest. Most candidates in the first 70 years of the 20th century was from New York or Ohio, but between 1976 and 2008 all candidates hailed from west of Ohio (see table A3 in appendix).

Chapter 9: Analysis

In this chapter I discuss my findings and put them into context. I will have a descriptive approach when describing my findings and an argumentative tone when discussing the meaning of, and explanations behind, my findings. I will go through the three hypothesis I outlined in the literature chapter and analyze the results from my empirical chapter before ending with a discussion on the relationship between hypotheses to conclude the chapter.

9.1 Hypothesis 1: The NRA and Republican Gun Policy

To test H1 I sought answers to three questions: (1) Did the NRA attempt to influence the Republican party in the time period I studied? (2) If so, were they successful in using this influence to make the Republican party take a more extreme position on gun policy? Lastly, (3) has there been a change in the NRA's approach over time? In my empirical chapter on the NRA I mapped out their political behavior as an organization, and how they attempted to shape politics, policy and its own membership base. Now, I will analyze this material. Below, I will explain why the evidence points to a 'yes'-answer for three questions, and why I accept H1.

On (1), my findings show conclusively that the NRA has made attempts to influence the Republican party, and most of the data I have presented on the NRA supports this. Just the establishment of the NRA-ILA alone proves they were interested in influencing lawmakers – be they Republican or Democratic. My findings also indicate that (2) the NRA *has* made a difference on Republican gun policy, and that this difference has been in making the GOP more extreme on guns. They have not been responsible for the entire shift, but part of it. The NRA has allied itself with the GOP using several of the tactics outlined in the literature chapter – most importantly the *legislative subsidy*. This will be outlined further in this section.

Republican party platforms and comments by Republican leaders demonstrate that gun policy has increased in saliency over time in the GOP. The number of gun words in party platforms tripled in the third era and increased slightly in the fourth. Gun policy was talked about more often by Ronald Reagan and his successors than his predecessors. However, Nixon, Ford, and Reagan rarely spoke of gun policy without mentioning crime and crime policy. The two were linked at the time. Starting in the 1990s (with the Congressional leadership of Dole and Gingrich), gun policy was talked about as a standalone policy topic, likely due to Democrats pushing for gun control.

The NRA moved closer to the GOP after the founding of the NRA-PVF and NRA-ILA. Figure 6-1 shows the percentage of their political contributions by party, and that there was a jump in partisanship in 1994, the first election after the *Brady Bill* and *Assault Weapons Ban of 1994* were signed into law. These had been proposed by Democrats and been supported in roll-call votes by over 80 percent of Democrats (Table A.3 in the Appendix). This move closer to the GOP happened in the two last eras, when NRA-PVF spending grew heavily. As seen in figures 6-2 and 6-3, there were big spending jumps in 2002, 2008, 2012, and 2016. This means that aligning with the NRA brought with it significant financial gains. Figure 6-4 confirms that an overwhelming majority of Republicans had grades of A- or higher.

While the NRA-PVF was moving to the right, so was the NRA-ILA. As seen in figure 6-5, their lobbying expenditures doubled from 1998 through 2017, with most of the increase coming in the fourth era (the same development as NRA-PVF spending). Figure 6-5 illustrates that the NRA-ILA shot up the rankings of the most-spending lobby groups in the fourth era.

All this happened as the NRA increased its membership base (figure 6-6). Membership initially grew slower but did grow noticeably faster after the organization started engaging more heavily in political matters. It then gained roughly two million members in the third era and almost two in the fourth. As outlined in the literature chapter, a large, unified membership is the key to getting the attention of lawmakers (Kenny et.al. 2004).

The NRA went about unifying its members around key policy goals by adjusting their focus over time. As shown by Lacombe (2018), this happens in response to the pressing issues of the time. In the decade and half before my historical chapters start, and during the entire first era, the focus of editorials was mainly on using firearms for marksmanship training and as a sport (hobby shooting and hunting). They only started focusing heavily on gun policy when gun regulation first became relevant in the 60s, making it the number one editorial topic in 1968 only – the year of the Gun Control Act.

Their approach is rational, as they keep readers engaged by discussing relevant issues. When crime was a hot topic linked with guns in the late 60s/early 70s and again in the 90s, *crime, self-defense, and guns* peaked as an editorial topic. The support of NRA lawyers to the idea of an individual right to bear arms is an example of the NRA being ahead of their time and attempting to shape policy. The individual right grew out of law review articles from NRA lawyers in the 1970s and took hold in the political and judicial spheres (Bogus 2000). In 1986, it was supported by Congress in the introduction to FOPA and became law after the Supreme Court case *Heller v. District of Columbia* in 2008. The

NRA's role in pushing this interpretation of the Second Amendment from obscurity to law shows how the NRA is a proactive organization that operates with long-term goals in mind.

Every datapoint I investigated showed the same trend: The NRA kept spending more money, growing in size, scope, level of political involvement, and partisanship. These points all affirm my suspicion that the NRA attempted to influence the GOP. Based on what the literature says on the relevance and power of lobby groups, this leads to the assumption that their chances of succeeding in influencing the GOP also grew over time.

Legislative Subsidy as a Gateway to Power

As established above, the growth in the NRA's membership base and the financial growth of the NRA-PVF and NRA-ILA has been of great benefit to the organization. Not just because of the looming shadow of millions of members or the funds spent on elections – but because of the significant legislative and electoral subsidy the NRA is able to provide pro-gun lawmakers.

The NRA went after conservative lawmakers (from both parties) because of what Hall and Wayman (1990) describes as the ability of "moneyed interests" to mobilize lawmakers that are predisposed to being sympathetic to the views of the interest group. The NRA found success by targeting natural allies. The lawmakers stayed allied with the NRA because they proved to deliver on their *legislative subsidy* – what Hall and Deardorff (2006) describes as "costly policy information, political intelligence, and labor to the enterprises of strategically selected legislators."

The law review articles mentioned above are not only opinion-shaping – to lawmakers they double as policy information and talking points. As mentioned in the literature chapter, "offering this "subsidy" to lawmakers with enough clout to generate momentum for their policy goals" is key to the success of the lobbying efforts of the NRA. The NRA has also proven a loyal ally to its friends, who get donations, endorsements, and good grades. These are all factors that make a difference in elections and drive conservative politicians towards the NRA since winning re-election is the main goal of legislators (Jones 2010). The evidence strongly substantiates that NRA support has led to pro-gun Republican candidates becoming more competitive in elections – compared to Democrats and moderate Republicans. This has shifted the balance among legislators in favor of the NRA.

Going the Extra Mile: Protecting Republicans from Bad PR

According to Mahoney and Baumgartner's (2015) theory on polarization, "government officials are expected to be more inclined to support issues where mass mobilization is occurring, and less inclined to involve themselves in issues that have high levels of partisanship and media attention, since partisanship often leads to negative media coverage." The NRA has managed to create mass mobilization against gun regulations among Republicans after high-profile mass shootings such as Newtown and Aurora in 2012, Las Vegas in 2016, and Parkland in 2018. This despite public and media pressure for more gun control. The literature suggests that pro-gun lawmakers would be inclined to make compromises on gun control to join the gun control mobilization that happens under these circumstances in order to avoid negative media attention from staying partisan – but they have not.

The NRA has simplified the public-facing aspects of gun policy for Republican lawmakers. They are useful to these officials because they take part of the negative coverage away from them – acting like a shield – with their controversial (and uncompromising) responses to shootings. This allows Republicans to offer their sympathies and murmur short comments about 'keeping guns out of the hands of criminals' after mass shootings while allowing the NRA to take the lead on defending guns with rhetoric that only appeals to pro-gun supporters. While Republicans seem supportive of gun control during the media frenzy that follows a high-profile shooting, they allow the NRA to keep fighting gun control – a lightning rod for gun controversy. This makes the NRA even more valuable than other lobby groups who offer legislative subsidies but don't go the extra mile.

The NRA has made gun policy black and white for Republicans. They are easy to get along with (and quite helpful) if you are a gun rights supporter, but very tough to deal with if not. The NRA is interested in what Mahoney and Baumgartner (2015) called the "overall issue context" – controlling the narrative of the public debate while sending signals to their allies in office. They do this after mass shooting by taking the ropes and giving lawmakers space to breath.

This is what being an ally of the NRA gets you – the complete package of support and legislative subsidy. This has shown itself to be a very attractive proposition to Republicans. In addition, the NRA has demonstrated its ruthlessness towards those who compromise on guns. The grade changes and calls to "name the betrayer's who voted for gun control" in the wake of the Parkland shooting demonstrates this quite well. As does the increase in partisanship and money spent on the 1994 election cycle, punishing those who voted for gun control in 1993 and 1994 and moving support away from Democrats. Many Republicans guilty of these votes received primary opponents backed by the NRA, communicated through *The American Rifleman* and *The American Hunter*. Similarly,

many conservative Democrats who had supported gun control saw their endorsements passed over to Republicans.

The NRA had a budget exceeding $100 million in 1994 and has been attributed a considerable influence in flipping the Democratic House majority in the that year's mid-term elections (Kenny et.al. 2004, p. 335). It is possible that the big push made by the NRA in these midterms was part of an effort to turn the tide on gun control. The NRA's unpopularity in the 90s (table 6-1) helped make it possible (or at least easier) to achieve federal gun regulation. There is no doubt a shift occurred at this time and that nothing the NRA does is a coincidence.

Changing Tactics Based on Access to the Executive

Gauging the influence of the gun lobby during the first era is not easy, and I've not been able to find many quotes from the Eisenhower administration that relate to gun policy. This isn't inconclusive, as it shows gun policy's lack of relevance at the time. The mass of data that is available shrinks the further back in time one goes, when the organization was not as large as it would become – meaning the influence was likely smaller.

The NRA appears to have had shared policy goals with most Republican Presidential administrations, and probably even had access to The White House during the Reagan, W. Bush, and Trump years.[56] They will have been a part of the thinking of any Republican President from the second era on. This is demonstrated by Nixon and his aides making the telling comment in 1972 on handguns, stating explicitly that they did not want to anger the gun lobby. This means that even early in the second era the gun lobby (spearheaded by the NRA) was a segment of the party a President would not want to anger. Thus, even at a stage where the NRA funding for Republican candidates was minute compared to the fourth era, Nixon feared the repercussions of defying the NRA. The effort by the NRA to abolish the ATF in 1981 after 15 months of lobbying the Reagan administration is also telling. It almost succeeded in shutting down an entire bureau but changed its mind and had the arrangement scrapped when it became clear that the role of regulating firearms would pass to the more stringent Secret Service. President George W. Bush helped in the passing of the PLCAA and did not deliver on the tepid pledge to moderates in the 2000 primary to federally fund trigger locks. None of these individual cases can lead to any definitive conclusions, but they can point to a trendline or reveal the penchant of certain Republican leaders. These trendlines are mostly in favor of the NRA.

[56] These are the President's I identify as most pro-gun.

Access to the Executive Branch would make talks behind the scenes likely as the preferred method of communication between the two parties, which would limit the need to wage war through public channels. It would make sense to have a Teddy Roosevelt inspired approach to gun policy when you have a foot in the door of power – "speak softly and carry a big stick." If you don't have this level of influence to the Executive branch you will be more inclined to apply public pressure. If the NRA had this level of influence it would limit my ability to illuminate part of their efforts.

NRA focus during the Reagan years shifted from fighting gun control on the federal level to lessening the enforcement of gun laws. During the Clinton years the NRA was on the defensive, and it went back on the offensive under George W. Bush, resulting in the passing of the PLCAA. An offensive NRA in this case is one that is pushing for federal pro-gun legislation – such as FOPA, shutting down the AFT in the 80s, and protecting firearm manufacturers against lawsuits in the early 2000s – as opposed to fighting gun control legislation – as with the import ban on assault weapons (1989-1990), the *Brady Bill*, the *Assault Weapons Ban of 1994*, and the *Gun Show Accountability Act* in 1999.

A Changing NRA

The data I've collected and highlighted in chapter 6 details a changing NRA over time. It's difficult to know how NRA members felt about gun control in the 50s and early 60s, but the organization was not very active politically, so it's fair to assume that its ability to influence politics was quite limited. This quickly changed in the late 60s and early 70s. I don't know exactly why this changed, but it is plausible that the introduction of the GCA activated the organization and forced it to consider a topic that had mostly laid dormant: Federal gun control. The diversity of opinions among members and employees probably decreased as the organization unified in its mission to oppose gun regulation.

A notable change with the post-reform NRA is the growth in size and scope. Anecdotally, its lobbying efforts became more expansive. I don't have extensive data on their monetary efforts during the 70s and 80s, but these efforts were certainly expanded drastically in the third and fourth eras. During the fourth era, the NRA is a massively powerful organization with a large operation. But as the NRA upped its spending on ballot initiatives, so did its opponents. It was outspent on all statewide ballot measures in 2014 and 2016 by margins of 20:1 (Washington), 3:1 (Nevada), and 6:1 (Maine).[57] It gained access to, and relevance in, the Republican party by helping to turn gun policy into a more controversial, partisan issue. The consequences are that it has sharpened the blades of its

[57] The biggest gun control spenders were Alliance for Gun Responsibility ERP Committee (Washington 2014), *Everytown for Gun Safety* (Maine 2016, Nevada 2016) and Microsoft co-Founder Paul Allen (Washington 2018) (Sneed 2014, Griffin 2016, Miller 2016, and Washington Public Disclosure Commission 2018).

opponents, who even outspent the NRA on several fronts in the last era. Helping to increase the partisanship of gun policy has had the effect of activating the other side.

The policy goals and modus operandi of the NRA and the Republican party have grown more cohesive over time. As the liberal wing of the Republican party fell away with the advent of Reagan's ideological takeover there was much support for the modern NRA interpretation of the Second Amendment within the GOP. By 2018, there was very little difference between the NRA and the average Republican politician on gun policy. That more than 80 percent of Republicans running for office nationwide from 2009 to 2017 had A-ratings from the NRA proves this. The opposite happened with Democrats – 56 percent of the party's Senate votes on S 2507 in 1972 were pro-gun – but this support gradually dissipated, as is seen in figure 7-7.

Conclusion

My findings have led me to conclude that the NRA (1) attempted to change Republican gun policy, (2) succeeded in affecting gun policy, and (3) changed over time to become bigger, more powerful, and more partisan. This means I have found support for the hypothesis. What it does not mean is that H1 – *an increased influence of the NRA caused the Republican Party to adopt more extreme gun policy* – is the complete answer to the thesis question. The NRA is not powerful enough to have done this on its own. While both the NRA-PVF and NRA-ILA have spent millions of dollars since the 1970s, they are not among the biggest spenders. Other interest groups still spend more but are not talked about as equally (or more) powerful than the NRA. Still, the NRA has been the top dog in the gun policy debate and have been able to push the Republican party's views more in line with its own. I cannot ascribe the changes to Republican gun policy to the NRA alone, as the issue is far too complex for such a broad statement. While there is always the threat that the NRA will support an individual lawmaker's primary opponent, the NRA usually has no other party to go to if they lack Republican support (as Democrats have grown less supportive of gun rights). This means there must be other factors at play. The NRA has been very successful in shaping policy, but not powerful enough to do so single-handedly. Therefore, the hypothesis stands, but with the understanding that other factors have been at play.

If Republican lawmakers had responded to mass shootings by rejecting the NRA narrative and joining Democrats in creating bipartisan gun reform, this would have forced me to discard H1. Such a development would mean that the legislative subsidy had seized to be effective and show weakness the NRA's sway over Republicans. Another hit against H1 would have been if Republican had not taken so wholeheartedly to NRA rhetoric. They have done so by adopting the NRA's interpretation of

the individual mandate and Second Amendment narrative on guns an important freedom from *American Rifleman* editorials.

9.2 Hypothesis 2: Polarization

The consensus in the literature is that polarization has occurred and that "the dysfunction in a polarized political climate arises when the actors involved move far enough away from each other on ideology and policy goals that it becomes next to impossible to cooperate" (Rosenfeld 2017). When tackling H2 – that *the polarization of American politics during the outlined period has resulted in the Republican Party adopting more extreme gun politics and explains the policy shift on guns* – I needed to prove two main points to confirm the hypothesis. (1) Polarization is real and (2) polarization has made the Republican party more pro-gun. My conclusion was that both had happened and that H2 is confirmed. Below, I describe why.

When testing (1), the result was that I found polarization to be a real phenomenon. Institutional polarization is proven in figures 7- 2-5, showing the dramatic increase in polarization among congressional Democrats and Republicans since 1945. This data from Poole et.al. (2015) tells a visual story of Congress, and it is the reason why Hotelling-Downs (1929, 1957) is not an ideal framework to interpret 21st century U.S. politics. Institutional polarization at this magnitude means the two parties are no longer interested in finding the centrist voters in most congressional elections.

There is a consensus in the literature that the Democratic party lost its conservative base when losing its dominance in the South in the second half of the 20th century (Jacobson 2013, Sinclair 2003, Roberts and Smith 2003). Figures 7-2 and 7-3 show Southern Democrats to represent the moderate wing of the party, while also showing them growing further away from the average Democrat over time.

Based on figure 7-1, House cohesion grew out of opposition. Democratic cohesion on committee and floor votes grew the most during the Reagan and Bush Sr. years (the numbers do not stretch far enough into the 21st Century to comment on Bush Jr.) and Republican cohesion grew most during the Clinton years.

Supporting the polarization claims was not a difficult task, as the available data backed the widely acknowledged claims discussed in the literature. The key question is whether this polarization has moved the needle on Republican gun policy – as outlined in H2. My conclusion is that it has.

Roll-Call Data Analysis

The data shows that polarization has grown with time. Some short periods have had stagnated or reduced polarization in Congress, but it has been growing most of the time – especially in the Senate. To dig deeper I used roll-call data from the Senate to gauge the impact polarization has had on gun policy voting records.

Figure 7-7 lays out all the Senate roll-call votes on guns I was able to find. While not all gun bills are created equal – FOPA and PLCAA (both Republican proposals backed by the NRA) had decent Democratic support – the figure makes it clear that polarization has impacted gun votes. Democrats, and all four Democratic sub-groups, grew more likely to support gun control over time. Conversely, Republicans were less likely to support gun control as time passes. Republicans were never very supportive of gun control: Their peak was 24.94 percent support in 1972, with 20.46 percent in 1993/94 coming second. The trendline was negative, and only 3.49 percent of Republican votes favored gun control in 2013. To relate this to H1, it is unlikely that the roll-call trends are the consequence of the NRA alone, as much of the divergence of gun control matches the general polarization in Congress.

Outside of Southern Democrats, Democrats did not change much from the 1972 – 1985. Republicans on the other hand saw gun control support reduced by two-thirds, mostly due to rural Senators. There was not much ideological change in the Senate in this period, but the NRA were more closely aligned with Republicans in 1985 than in 1972. Additionally, FOPA was a Republican proposal supported by a Republican President, so it is unlikely many Republicans would have opposed it.

1985 – 1993 was the time when the Democratic party increased its cohesion in Congress, and this matches their increased support for the (Democratically proposed) *Brady Bill* and the *Assault Weapons Ban* compared to earlier gun votes. Republicans, who became much more cohesive in congressional voting during the mid-90s, supported gun control in the 93/94 bills more than in 1985, but less than in 1972. Senate Republicans became slightly more conservative during the third era, and supported gun control slightly less than before when voting on PLCAA in 2005. After this, they became much more conservative, and their gun votes in 2013 matches this development. Polarization trends, as outlined in the literature and empirical chapters, matches the gun vote changes over time for both parties. This is key evidence supporting H2.

The Urban/Rural Divide and the Relationship Between Gerrymandering and Self-Sorting

As a result of self-sorting (and by virtue of being the conservative party), the GOP has become dominant in rural America. Their dominance in rural districts in recent years is mainly due to self-sorting. Rural America houses most of the nation's conservatives, and the GOP's success at flipping Southern Democratic seats has given them a stronghold on American conservatism. The increased control over rural America by the GOP is a sign of a unification of values between the GOP and rural Americans. The NRA used this unification to get a hold of both, as evident by the 77 percent of NRA members who identified as Republicans in 2017.

Figure 7-7 tells one tale of polarization, but another of an urban/rural divide. If rural states have become more conservative, as self-sorting suggests, then I would expect rural Democrats to have become fewer in numbers but more conservative. The first part bears out, but the latter does not. Figure 7-7 shows rural Democrats becoming more supportive of gun control over time. They only voted for gun control 22.83 percent of the time in 1972 and 18.58 percent in 1985. In the next three data points they supported gun control in more than half of their votes. This goes against the expected results and make it apparent that sorting is not the only factor at play. It is not possible to conclude that self-sorting is not in play because of this finding, as states are more diverse and culturally complex than most House districts. Therefore, an analysis of House votes on would illuminate this area better.

Urban Republicans were more likely to vote for gun control than their rural colleagues. The difference between the two groups was largest in the fourth era (ten-fold), which comports with the other data suggesting this is the most polarized era.

Figure 7-8 shows the overstated emphasis on gerrymandering in American media that the literature eluded to (Wasserman 2018, Bishop 2009). Gerrymandering is responsible for 17 of the 92 House districts that moved out of the swing category from 1997 to 2018, with the rest becoming safer for one party over time through elections. Sorting has played a bigger role than gerrymandering in causing polarization, but it may have made it easier to gerrymander (because Democrats cluster into cities).

Rethinking Hotelling-Downs

As discussed earlier, Hotelling-Downs is not an ideal framework when politicians are not interested in appealing to centrist voters. With the decline in swing districts Hotelling-Downs is not as applicable

now as during the first era. Data from Poole et.al. (2015, figures 7-2–7-5) and Wasserman (2018, figure 7-8) visualizes this. With re-election as the main goal, moderation is not incentivized to lawmakers representing safe districts. It is easy to justify partisanship over cooperation on most issues for lawmakers in these districts. If most voters are entrenched within a single party it might be useful to evaluate the age-old model from within parties, not outside them. While true independents (those who are independent of parties and don't lean towards either side) will still consider shopping in both stores, the rest will not. Therefore, the rationality of Downs will limit itself to choices within one party. Voters in such a system will not ask themselves which party can best represent their interests, but which faction (party within the party) will do so. i.e. a progressive or a *Blue Dog* Democrat? A moderate or a *Tea Party* Republican?"

Conclusion

I am confirming H2 as true. Just as with H1, H2 does not explain all the change that has happened, but the Republican evolution on gun policy cannot be properly explained without it. If the extensive polarization in the data from Poole et.al. had not occurred, it is unlikely that the Republican party would be where it is today on gun policy. The party has no interest in stricter laws, and when they last had a chance to vote on gun regulations (in 2013), only 3.5 percent of their votes were in favor. This is compared to 25.9 percent in a series of 1972 votes with much more controversial amendments, incl. amendments from Philip Hart (D-Michigan) and Ted Kennedy (D-Massachusetts) to outlaw handguns and establish a national gun registry.[58]

Because interest groups largely buy into the agendas of politicians and try to push these agendas in the "right" direction, it is impossible for the NRA to be responsible for the Republican party's extreme gun policy by itself. It is not in the interest of major party in a two-party system to turn a small yet controversial issue into a major wedge-issue simply because a lobby group of second tier size and financial muscle asks it to.[59] Only in a system were the two parties diverged from each other and voters started rewarding partisanship is this possible. The NRA grew in size, importance and financial muscle during this process, and helped Republican effectively with their legislative subsidy – but they did not create the underlying political mechanisms that made gun policy a wedge-issue. They simply took advantage of it.

[58] They were voted down 7-84 and 11-78.
[59] In 2018, the NRA is a top-tier lobby group by these parameters, but this was not always the case.

For me to conclude that the evidence did not support H2, I would have needed to observe a pattern where Senate votes on gun policy did not match the overarching trends of polarization. It would have been difficult to confirm the hypothesis if I had not found clear trendlines in figure 7-7. If the two parties didn't grow apart on gun votes over time, or if there was not a big difference in voting patterns of the various categories (urban, rural, etc.) then the hypothesis could not be confirmed.

9.3 Hypothesis 3: Presidential Primaries

To test H3, the hypothesis that democratizing the Republican Presidential primary process gave the party's pro-gun grassroots the power to steer gun policy in a more conservative direction, I have employed data on Presidential primaries, the candidates running in them, and the party platforms that emerged after the primaries were over.[60] To support this hypothesis, I needed to find pro-gun candidates succeeding at a greater pace after the 1976 reform than before it. I did not find data that suggested this, and therefore I discard H3.

The impact of Primary Reform

What I have been able to confirm is that Republicans running for President became more conservative as time passed. Every primary post 1980 featured candidates to the right of Ronald Reagan (the most conservative candidate in 1968, 1976, and 1980). Figure 8-1 shows how the average Republican Presidential candidate has become more conservative as the primaries have gone on, candidates with CFScores lower than 0.5 have become rare and every primary post-1980 featured more fringe candidates with scores of 1.4 or greater. It is clear that the reform made it easier for more conservative candidate to run. It is hard, however, to determine whether the reforms themselves were the drivers of this change or not, as the increase in conservatism among candidates also corresponds to the growing conservatism of congressional Republicans. These findings are therefore inconclusive.

As seen in the polarization chapter, the rightward shift in Congress started happening to the GOP in the early 1980s and accelerated the most in the mid- to late 1990s in the House and after 2010 in the Senate. If the Republican grassroots started moving significantly to the right during the 80s and 90s, this would be felt in the House first.[61] Since the House has all seats up for re-election every two years – as opposed to one-third every two years in the Senate and every four years for President – the

[60] Tables 5.1 and 5.2 are brought over from chapter 5 when needed.
[61] In national politics.

effects of voter realignments will be most evident in the House.[62] By this logic there will be a delayed response in Presidential politics. This is the case in figure 8-1, where the average candidate had moved to where Reagan was in 1980 by 2000.

A counter-point is that Reagan was an early leader in the conservative movement (a movement that has produced many Presidential hopefuls much more conservative than Reagan himself) who found traction in primaries before House Republicans started swinging right in the 1980s. The same with Goldwater in 1964. This does not prove any more than that the Republican party had a conservative wing. Had the shift towards more right-wing conservatism happened because of Goldwater in 1964, Reagan would not have failed as badly as he did in 1968. The change came later, and how close Reagan came to win the 1976 nomination indicates that he and Goldwater were ahead of their time in the party, and that the move to the right happened around the time of the democratization process. In other words, the reforms did have an effect in giving the conservative wing a greater chance. That does not mean the reforms created the change.

The other piece of evidence suggesting that the democratization of primaries affected candidates is that Nixon, Ford, and Bush Sr. were a lot further to the left in Congress than as President. Mitt Romney moved well to the right when running in 2008, compared to his Senate run in Massachusetts in 1994. He also moved to the right during the 2012 primaries. It is possible that Nixon had moved naturally to the right from his time in Congress to when he became President, but it is notable nonetheless.[63] George Bush took over Reagan's party and White House in 1989 and had to win the nomination in this political climate, so it is no surprise he governed further to the right than from the time he represented a moderate Houston district in Congress in the late 60s. Still, this shows that as the party moved to the right, Bush had to adapt. Romney's move right was likely part of an effort to increase his chances of winning the nomination, meaning he was pushed right by the voters.

This had indirect effects on gun policy, as a more conservative party meant a more pro-gun party. George Bush was the only President in my study to anger the NRA (with his import ban), meaning not all Republicans followed the more conservative line – Bush was known as more of a moderate. Nixon didn't dare take on guns as much as he wanted to because of the "rifle association," and Mitt Romney ran as a gun rights supporter in the Republican primaries after signing an assault weapons ban as governor of liberal Massachusetts. The voters you represent matter, and politicians are moved by their desires.

[62] Unless issues that only relate to the Senate, such as judicial or executive nominations or foreign policy authorizations, are of specific concern in the realignment. A general realignment will hit House members first.
[63] He left Congress to become Vice President in 1953 and became President in 1969.

There is an increased consensus on guns over time among candidates, as seen in chapter 5 on political leaders. Republicans running in the third era talked about gun control on occasion. Bob Dole ran in 1996 on the instant background check system, and George W. Bush adopted McCain's trigger lock policy and supported instant background checks at gun shows in 2000. He never tried initiating these policies as President and did not promote them when running for re-election. The three Republican nominees for President in the fourth era were all staunch supporters of gun rights and did not mention compromising on guns in their campaigns.

Party Platforms

The democratization hypothesis takes another hit in tables 5.1 and 5.2, showing Republican party platforms increasing their gun mentions way later than the Presidential reforms. Gun mentions first entered the scene in 1968, the year of the GCA, and remained steady at 1-5 mentions through 1996, jumping to 11 in 2000, and staying in the teens after that. My textual analysis showed that the saliency grew over time, and that grouping party platforms by era aptly demonstrated the growing relevancy of gun policy as a topic. I was almost non-existent in the first era, an emerging topic in the second, became a wedge-issue the third, and stayed this way in the fourth.[64] It is notable that the increases in gun mentions happened in the 1996 and 2000 platforms. This is during the same time when the congressional Republicans had their first polarization point, and not when the grassroots first got increased influence in 1976 and 1980. This is another factor leading to the rejection of H3.

The Importance of 1976

It is not clear that the Democratization of the Presidential primaries resulted in a gun policy more supportive of gun rights, but it is clear that it made the nomination process more chaotic and less predictable. The data suggests the party has moved to the right, but nothing else. This was the reason I added the qualitative data on the outlier primaries. These suggest the party has a conservative wing, and that this wing grew in power. This can be explained by the polarization data from Poole et.al. (2015) and the party's ideological shift to the right – it does not require data on presidential nominations. The outliers suggest that the nomination process became messier and

[64] I did find Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama to be very moderate in their approach to gun policy in the 2008 Democratic primary, so it is clear that there are brief ups and downs to an otherwise linear development (Obama and Clinton, 2008).

more difficult to control for party leaders after the reforms. The reform opened up space for more conservative, presumably pro-gun candidates, but it does not equate to a change in policy.

My data suggests that I was not wrong in thinking something significant happened in 1976. This year appears to have been a watershed moment for the party, as Reagan and the conservative wing gained a permanent foothold. This was more of a long-term change than when Barry Goldwater won a primary without a clear frontrunner or an establishment choice for the nomination in 1964. Reagan took Ford to extra-time and lost but brought conservatism to the next level in doing so. This is confirmed by the regional changes evident in illustrations 8-1 and 8-2. The trends these illustrations visualize are compatible with the overall changes from polarization, but also represent the leadership that helped speed up these regional changes.

It is unclear whether the rule changes to the primaries caused these changes directly, but it certainly played a part. Therefore, 1976 was an important year for Republicans, but not because it changed the gun policies of the party. The literature still shows how the party establishment kept deciding candidates after this, but my data suggests they had a wider field to choose from. H3 is not responsible for changing the gun policies of the party, and the hypothesis is therefore rejected.

9.4 Discussion

The premise for both H1 and H3 is that something of significance happened in the 1970s – be it NRA's internal reforms or the GOP reforming the Presidential primary system. While it is tempting to explain a phenomenon (such as a changing gun debate) through the filter of reform – hard-fast dates with specific changes making for straightforward causality – what I found was that it is the long-term trends that are most noteworthy. The most dominant political trend in the United States since the 1970s is polarization. My literature and empirical chapters have shown how polarization has caused ripples throughout politics: It has made parties more internally cohesive (especially the GOP) and externally distinct from one another (Jones 2010, Roberts and Smith 2003), significantly decreased the congressional success of President's in times of divided government (Sinclair 2003), and created an ideological rift separating the two parties (Poole et.al. 2015).

The NRA has taken advantage of the effects of polarization. They have targeted Republicans (as well as rural Democrats), and polling and membership numbers show they have succeeded in building a large base of conservative members. This has been done while voters have gotten more polarized through self-sorting, creating more ideologically homogenous districts (Kirkland 2014, Wasserman 2018). These trends have made it easier for the NRA to make inroads into rural and conservative

America and gain the clout needed to influence lawmakers. The NRA used these trends to turn gun policy into a more controversial, wedge-like issue. The wedge was along the urban/rural divide more than the partisan divide, but these two divides have converged over time, making gun policy central to both rural America and conservatism – and thus, the conditions were ripe for the NRA's growth in stature within both camps.

The NRA combined this with a tactic fitting Hall and Deardorff's (2006) theory on the *legislative subsidy*, which outlined how lobby groups can help lawmakers beyond financial support. It is notable that while the NRA kept growing in size and financial muscle throughout the second and third eras, their sharpest increase in these areas came in the fourth era. This is the same era where figures 7-2 – 7-5 on ideology show the greatest increase in polarization. Senate polarization was at its most rapid in the fourth era (figure 7-4) and there was zero ideological overlap in either chamber of Congress in this era (figure 7-5). It is unlikely a coincidence that the NRA had its heaviest (measurable) influence and level of partisanship in this era.[65] Therefore, H1 and H2 are linked.

Based on my theoretical and empirical chapters it is likely that the NRA has been an important player in how gun policy has grown in relevance. Still, the media narratives blaming the NRA for most of what the left sees as wrong with gun policy are not supported by me. The NRA has become an important organization on this front due to the overarching developments within the GOP and in rural America. As discussed in the methodological chapter, I cannot make claims about which outcomes would have occurred if a causal mechanism was removed. Therefore, I cannot say that the NRA would not have achieved great levels of political influence had there been less polarization, but I do claim that polarization played a part in creating a political atmosphere that was advantageous to the NRA and that the NRA has taken advantage of it.

[65] As discussed earlier, it is not possible for me to measure whether the NRA had periods of increased influence during Republican administrations. "Measurable" influence refers to overt activity by the NRA-PVF and NRA-ILA.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

I set out to find out why the Republican party became extreme in their handling of gun control. I have done this by setting up a case study that stands on firm theoretical ground with a detailed account of events in two historical chapters. I have applied a range of quantitative data, supported by some qualitative data.

There are many stereotypes and 'common knowledge' falsities relating to gun policy in the American public discourse. These stereotypes often present the NRA as the bogeyman, buying influence from corrupt Republican lawmakers – some even go the extreme of calling the NRA responsible for mass shootings (Dickinson 2016). There is also a media narrative presenting gerrymandering as the main culprit in generating polarization, and that its indirect consequence is the emboldening of pro-gun Republicans by the electoral safety net created by gerrymandering. I have dispelled some of the misconceptions surrounding both these phenomena by presenting the NRA as a rational actor that goes after natural allies and courts them with an impressive legislative subsidy. I have also demonstrated the limited scope of gerrymandering by showing that polarization is a naturally occurring force in the population, and not a man-made phenomenon.

In my historical background and empirical chapters, I presented stories and data that showed how the Republican party had changed over time to become more pro-gun. I then found support for my hypotheses on the NRA and polarization as having been causes of part of this change. Both the literature and third-party data I have used pointed in the direction of a more polarized political climate over time in the United States. Especially in the late 1980s and beyond. Through my research on roll-call data from gun bills I was able to link polarization to gun control in a tangible way. Here, I showed that all Democratic groups grew more supportive of gun control, with the inverse happening with Republicans. This trend was constant for all groups, including those where self-sorting would seem to indicate otherwise: On gun votes, urban Republicans and rural Democrats grew more cohesive with their own party instead of in line with the rurality or urbanity of their home states.

More distance between the two parties on gun control is one of many side-effects of polarization. There is no reason to think that the growing distance between the two parties has not had similar effects on other policy areas. My data on roll-call votes also sheds lights on the growing divide between urban and rural states. This is another area where polarization has had an effect. Urban Republicans and rural Democrats diminished in numbers over the years, and they also grew more in-line with their intra-party colleagues.

An important part of the NRA's success in taking advantage of polarization is the coalescence of conservative and rural values. Self-sorting has created a more homogenous rural politic, as this part of the country has become dominated by conservative values. At the same time, Republicans have gotten more conservative and Democrats more liberal – Republicans in part by shedding their liberal Rockefeller wing and Democrats with their shrinking conservative wing. Because conservatism fled the inner-cities (to be found mostly in suburban and rural areas) it took over the rural areas and embraced the Republican party. The result has been a value convergence in rural America. One where being rural, conservative and Republican is often one and the same. Therefore, when lawmakers, organizations, activists, and members of the media criticize gun rights and call for gun control, this is not just an attack on Republican politics, it is an assault on rural and conservative values. It is an incursion into the rural American's way of life.

There are many other characteristics that describe rural culture, and the former paragraph contains some generalizations in the name of brevity. Firstly, not all rural politics is dominated by Republicans, and many pro-gun rural Democrats remain. They are however fewer in numbers than their Republican brethren. There is also an element of religiosity to the rural lifestyle. This is a culture where the local church is the epicenter of social life, family values are nourished, and a sense of community is key. The political backdrop to this way of life is best described in the Jacksonian tradition of Mead's 'Special Providence,' where it is referred to as the *Folk Community* (2009, p. 218-263). Members feel a sense of self-identification and pride in their community, and the *Folk Community* is often trampled from the outside, as it gets little respect from the opinion shaping cultural and political elites (Ibid, p. 224). This likely emboldens the (often rural, conservative) members of the *Folk Community* to protect their culture from the rest of society – gun and hunting culture included. The NRA plays to this cultural element in their magazines and online media.

I've also highlighted the rationale behind pro-gun lawmakers' allegiance to the NRA. As the NRA has grown in political importance, so has their ties to the Republican party. While the NRA could not have helped push the Republican party in favor of gun rights as much as they did without polarization, they have played an important role in keeping the party in line during times of immense pressure following mass shootings. Controversial NRA statements post-shootings has acted as a way to signal both messaging and unity to Republican lawmakers. It has also been a way to absorb public blows in the wake of such events. If you are a Republican lawmaker representing anything but a liberal or particularly swingy state or district, the NRA is the only game in town when gun policy comes up. Not only would defying them be done at your own risk, but you will also be losing out on a significant legislative subsidy. Being a non-urban, pro-gun Republican is therefore equivalent to being a rational actor.

I have made several contributions to the research field of gun policy and its relation to party politics in the United States. I've highlighted polarization as a strong force in American politics, and as one that has the power to change the policies of parties. I've tracked the development of the NRA over time and shown how they've ramped up their operations while trending more Republican. I've shown how Presidential primaries are illustrations of the greater dynamics of politics more than a driving force itself. Combining this with the elimination of some political clichés has allowed me to tell a complex story based on evidence.

My findings open up a range of questions to be explored in further research. It is possible to scale up my design by delving further into gun votes in the House and by studying the behind the scenes operations of the NRA more closely, perhaps using interviews. Revealing what caused the growth in polarization could be key to understanding the dynamics of American politics, and my design could also be applied loosely to other controversial topics where one could study its development over time. This could be done with abortion, climate change, immigration or any other topic where the two parties have moved away from each other. Applying my design to other countries would not be recommended without making significant alterations, as the polarization I have researched is quite unique to the United States – as is the party and governmental structure. The urban/rural divide is another topic worth studying further.

Gun control as a policy area has been on the ascendance in the third and fourth eras and ended the latter a high-profile wedge-issue with massive mobilization on both sides – six million NRA members and more than a million marching for tougher laws. While the NRA has been portrayed as the bogeyman, polarization is the biggest reason the Republican party has become extreme in their approach to gun control. The NRA has taken advantage of this and employed long-term strategies to turning almost every national Republican figure pro-gun.

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Other

U.S. Constitution, Amendment 2

Appendix

Table A1.1 – 1972: S 2509

State	Class	Gun Control	Pro-gun	Total votes	Hart Amnd.	Kennedy Amnd.	Stevenson Amnd.	Brock Amnd.	Dominick Amnd. II	Fannin Amnd.	Hruska Amnd.	Stevens Amnd.	S 2509 passage
AK	R.D.	0	9	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
AK	R.R.	0	9	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
AL	R.D.	0	9	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
AL	R.D.	3	6	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
AR	R.D.	4	5	9	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
AR	R.D.	2	7	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
AZ	U.R.	0	9	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
AZ	U.R.	0	8	8	N	N	N	N	N	N.V.	N	N	N
CA	U.D.	4	3	7	N.V.	N.V.	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
CA	U.D.	8	1	9	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
CN	U.D.	9	0	9	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
CN	U.R.	0	9	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
CO	U.R.	2	7	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
CO	U.R.	1	7	8	N	N	N	N	N		Y	N	N
DE	R.R.	4	5	9	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
DE	R.R.	4	5	9	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
FL	U.D.	2	6	8	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N.V.	Y
FL	U.R.	2	7	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
GA	R.D.	1	1	2	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N	N.V.	N.V.	Y
GA	R.D.	3	6	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
HI	U.D.	5	4	9	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
HI	U.R.	7	2	9	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
IA	R.D.	6	3	9	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
IA	R.R.	2	7	9	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
ID	R.R.	2	7	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
ID	R.R.	2	7	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
IL	U.D.	5	4	9	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
IL	U.R.	5	3	8	N.V.	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
IN	R.D.	5	4	9	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
IN	R.D.	5	4	9	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
KS	R.R.	2	6	8	N	N	N	N	N.V.	N	Y	N	Y
KS	R.R.	2	7	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y

KY	R.R.	3	6	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
KY	R.R.	6	3	9	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
LA	R.D.	3	3	6	N	N	N.V.	Y	N.V.	Y	N	N.V.	Y
LA	R.D.	5	4	9	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
MA	U.D.	9	0	9	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
MA	U.R.	9	0	9	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
MD	U.R.	1	8	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
MD	U.R.	4	5	9	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
ME	R.D.	7	2	9	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
ME	R.R.	3	6	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
MI	U.D.	7	2	9	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
MI	U.R.	3	2	5	N	N	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	Y	Y	N.V.	Y
MN	R.D.	4	5	9	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
MN	R.D.	5	4	9	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
MO	R.D.	1	8	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
MO	R.D.	3	6	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
MS	R.D.	1	7	8	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N.V.	N
MS	R.D.	2	7	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
MT	R.D.	1	8	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
MT	R.D.	0	9	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
NC	R.R.	4	5	9	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
NC	R.D.	4	5	9	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
ND	R.D.	3	6	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
ND	R.R.	2	6	8	N	N.V.	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
NE	R.R.	1	8	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
NE	R.R.	1	8	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
NH	R.D.	3	6	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
NH	R.R.	1	8	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
NJ	U.D.	8	1	9	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
NJ	U.R.	6	2	8	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N.V.	Y	Y	Y
NM	R.R.	4	5	9	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
NM	R.R.	2	7	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
NV	U.D.	1	8	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
NV	U.D.	2	7	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
NY	U.D.	8	1	9	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
NY	U.R.	2	7	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y

OH	U.R.	0	9	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
OH	U.R.	2	5	7	N.V.	N.V.	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
OK	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	Y	Y	Y
OK	R.R.	1	8	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
OR	R.R.	3	6	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
OR	R.R.	1	8	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
PA	R.R.	0	9	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
PA	R.R.	4	5	9	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
RI	U.D.	7	2	9	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
RI	U.D.	2	0	2	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N	N.V.	Y	Y	N.V.
SC	R.D.	5	4	9	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
SC	R.R.	1	8	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
SD	R.D.	2	2	4	N	N	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	Y	N.V.	Y
SD	R.R.	0	0	0	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.
TN	R.R.	0	7	7	N	N	N.V.	N.V.	N	N	N	N	N
TN	R.R.	1	8	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
TX	U.D.	2	7	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
TX	U.R.	0	9	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
UT	U.D.	1	8	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
UT	U.R.	0	9	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
VA	R.D.	3	6	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
VA	R.D.	3	5	8	N	N	N.V.	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
VT	R.R.	2	7	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
VT	R.R.	0	9	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
WA	R.D.	3	6	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
WA	R.D.	3	6	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
WI	R.D.	5	4	9	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
WI	R.D.	2	7	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
WV	R.D.	4	5	9	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
WV	R.D.	4	5	9	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
WY	R.D.	0	7	7	N	N	N	N	N	N	N.V.	N.V.	N
WY	R.R.	0	9	9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

Y = Voted for gun regulation – either for new regulations or for keeping old regulations

N = Voted against gun regulation – either against new regulations or for eliminating old regulations

N.V. = Not Voting

R.R. = Rural Republican, U.R. = Urban Republican, R.D. = Rural Democrat, U.D. = Urban Democrat

Table A1.2 – 1985: Firearms Owners' Protection Act

State	Class	Gun Control	Pro-gun	Total votes	Kennedy Amnd.	Mathias Amnd.	Inouye Amnd.	S 49 passage
AL	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
AL	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
AK	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
AK	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
AZ	U.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
AZ	U.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
AR	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
AR	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
CA	U.D.	4	0	4	N	N	N	N
CA	U.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
CO	U.D.	1	3	4	N	Y	N	N
CO	U.R.	0	0	0	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.
CT	U.D.	4	0	4	N	N	N	N
CT	U.R.	1	3	4	N	Y	N	Y
DE	R.D.	1	3	4	N	Y	Y	Y
DE	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
FL	U.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
FL	U.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
GA	R.D.	1	3	4	Y	N	Y	Y
GA	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
HI	U.D.	4	0	4	N	N	N	N
HI	U.D.	4	0	4	N	N	N	N
ID	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
ID	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
IL	U.D.	1	3	4	N	Y	Y	Y
IL	U.D.	0	0	0	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.
IN	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
IN	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
IA	R.D.	3	1	4	N	N	N	Y
IA	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
KS	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
KS	R.R.	2	2	4	N	Y	N	Y
KY	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y

KY	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
LA	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
LA	R.D.	0	0	0	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.
ME	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
ME	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
MD	U.D.	4	0	4	N	N	N	N
MD	U.R.	4	0	4	N	N	N	N
MA	U.D.	4	0	4	N	N	N	N
MA	D.U.	4	0	4	N	N	N	N
MI	R.D.	3	1	4	N	Y	N	N
MI	R.D.	1	3	4	N	Y	Y	Y
MN	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
MN	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
MS	R.D.	0	1	1	Y	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.
MS	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
MO	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
MO	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
MT	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
MT	R.D.	1	3	4	Y	Y	N	Y
NE	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
NE	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
NV	U.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
NV	U.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
NH	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
NH	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
NJ	U.D.	0	0	0	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.
NJ	U.D.	4	0	4	N	N	N	N
NM	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
NM	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
NY	U.D.	4	0	4	N	N	N	N
NY	U.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
NC	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
NC	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
ND	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
ND	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
OH	R.D.	3	1	4	N	N	N	Y

OH	R.D.	4	0	4	N	N	N	N
OK	R.D.	2	2	4	N	Y	N	Y
OK	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
OR	R.R.	0	1	1	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	Y
OR	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
PA	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
PA	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
RI	U.D.	4	0	4	N	N	N	N
RI	U.R.	4	0	4	N	N	N	N
SC	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
SC	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
SD	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
SD	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
TN	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
TN	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
TX	U.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
TX	U.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
UT	U.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
UT	U.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
VT	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
VT	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
VA	R.R.	1	3	4	Y	Y	N	Y
VA	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
WA	R.R.	2	2	4	N	N	Y	Y
WA	R.R.	2	2	4	N	N	Y	Y
WV	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
WV	R.D.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
WI	R.D.	2	2	4	N	Y	N	Y
WI	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
WY	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
WY	R.R.	0	4	4	Y	Y	Y	Y

Y = Voted ‘yay’ (blue amendments/bills are pro-gun control)
N = Voted ‘nay’ (red amendments/bills are pro-gun)
N.V. = Not Voting
R.R. = Rural Republican, U.R. = Urban Republican, R.D. = Rural Democrat, U.D. = Urban Democrat

Table A1.3 – 1993/94: Brady Bill and Assault Weapons Ban of 1994

State	Class	Gun Control	Pro-gun	# of votes	Mitchell Amnd.	Mitchell Amnd. II	Brady passage	AWB passage
AL	R.D.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
AL	R.D.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
AK	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
AK	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
AZ	U.D.	3	1	4	Y	N	Y	Y
AZ	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
AR	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
AR	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
CA	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
CA	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
CO	U.D.	1	3	4	N	N	N	Y
CO	U.R.	1	3	4	N	N	N	Y
CT	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
CT	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
DE	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
DE	U.R.	2	2	4	N	N	Y	Y
FL	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
FL	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
GA	R.D.	3	1	4	Y	N	Y	Y
GA	U.R.	1	3	4	N	N	Y	N
HI	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
HI	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
ID	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
ID	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
IL	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
IL	U.D.	2	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
IN	U.R.	2	2	4	N	N	Y	Y
IN	U.R.	3	1	4	Y	N	Y	Y
IA	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
IA	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
KS	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
KS	U.R.	3	1	4	Y	Y	Y	N
KY	R.D.	2	2	4	N	N	Y	Y

KY	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
LA	R.D.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
LA	R.D.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
ME	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
ME	U.R.	1	3	4	N	N	Y	N
MD	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
MD	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
MA	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
MA	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
MI	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
MI	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
MN	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
MN	U.R.	3	1	4	Y	Y	Y	N
MS	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
MS	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
MO	U.R.	1	3	4	N	N	Y	N
MO	U.R.	3	1	4	Y	Y	Y	N
MT	R.D.	2	2	4	N	N	Y	Y
MT	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
NE	R.D.	3	1	4	Y	N	Y	Y
NE	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
NV	U.D.	2	2	4	Y	N	Y	N
NV	U.D.	3	1	4	Y	Y	Y	N
NH	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
NH	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
NJ	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
NJ	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
NM	R.D.	2	2	4	Y	N	Y	N
NM	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
NY	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
NY	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
NC	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
NC	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
ND	R.D.	2	2	4	N	N	Y	Y
ND	R.D.	0	0	0	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.
OH	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y

OH	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
OK	R.D.	3	1	4	Y	N	Y	Y
OK	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
OR	U.R.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	N
OR	U.R.	1	3	4	N	N	Y	N
PA	R.D.	3	1	4	Y	N	Y	Y
PA	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
RI	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
RI	U.R.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
SC	R.D.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
SC	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	Y	N
SD	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
SD	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
TN	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
TN	R.D.	2	2	4	Y	N	Y	N
TX	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
TX	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
UT	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
UT	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
VT	R.D.	1	3	4	Y	N	N	Y
VT	U.R.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
VA	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
VA	U.R.	3	1	4	Y	N	Y	N
WA	U.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
WA	U.R.	1	3	4	N	N	Y	N
WV	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
WV	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
WI	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
WI	R.D.	4	0	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
WY	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N
WY	U.R.	0	4	4	N	N	N	N

Y = Voted 'yay' (blue amendments/bills are pro-gun control)
N = Voted 'nay' (red amendments/bills are pro-gun)
N.V. = Not Voting
R.R. = Rural Republican, U.R. = Urban Republican, R.D. = Rural Democrat, U.D. = Urban Democrat

Table A1.4 – 2005: Protection of Lawful Commerce of Arm Act

State	Class	Gun Control	Pro-gun	# of votes	McConnell cloture	Kohl Amnd.	Lautenberg Amnd.	Craig Amnd.	Kennedy Amnd.	Reed Amnd.	Final passage
AL	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
AL	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
AK	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
AK	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
AZ	U.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
AZ	U.R.	0	7	7	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
AR	R.D.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
AR	R.D.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
CA	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
CA	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
CO	U.D.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
CO	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
CT	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
CT	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
DE	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
DE	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
FL	U.D.	5	2	7	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
FL	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
GA	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
GA	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
HI	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
HI	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
ID	R.R.	0	6	6	N.V.	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
ID	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
IL	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
IL	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
IN	R.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
IN	R.R.	2	5	7	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
IA	R.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
IA	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
KS	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
KS	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
KY	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y

KY	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
LA	R.D.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
LA	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
ME	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
ME	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
MD	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MD	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MA	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MA	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MI	R.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MI	R.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MN	R.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MN	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
MS	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
MS	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
MO	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
MO	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
MT	R.D.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
MT	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
NE	R.D.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
NE	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
NV	U.D.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
NV	U.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
NH	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
NH	R.R.	1	2	3	Y	Y	N.V.	Y	N.V.	N.V.	N.V.
NJ	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
NJ	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
NM	R.D.	6	1	7	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
NM	R.R.	1	5	6	Y	Y	N	N.V.	N	N	Y
NY	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
NY	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
NC	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
NC	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
ND	R.D.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
ND	R.D.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
OH	R.R.	6	1	7	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N

OH	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
OK	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
OK	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
OR	R.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
OR	R.R.	1	5	6	Y	Y	N	Y	N.V.	N	Y
PA	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
PA	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
RI	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
RI	U.R.	6	1	7	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
SC	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
SC	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
SD	R.D.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
SD	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
TN	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
TN	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
TX	U.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
TX	U.R.	0	6	6	Y	N	N	Y	N.V.	N	Y
UT	U.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
UT	U.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
VT	R.D.	6	1	7	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
VT	R.D.	5	2	7	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
VA	R.R.	6	1	7	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
VA	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
WA	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
WA	U.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
WV	R.D.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
WV	R.D.	2	4	6	N.V.	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y
WI	R.D.	5	2	7	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
WI	R.D.	7	0	7	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
WY	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
WY	R.R.	0	7	7	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y

Y = Voted 'yay' (blue amendments/bills are pro-gun control)
N = Voted 'nay' (red amendments/bills are pro-gun)
N.V. = Not Voting
R.R. = Rural Republican, U.R. = Urban Republican, R.D. = Rural Democrat, U.D. = Urban Democrat

Table A1.5 – 2013: Assault Weapons Ban of 2013

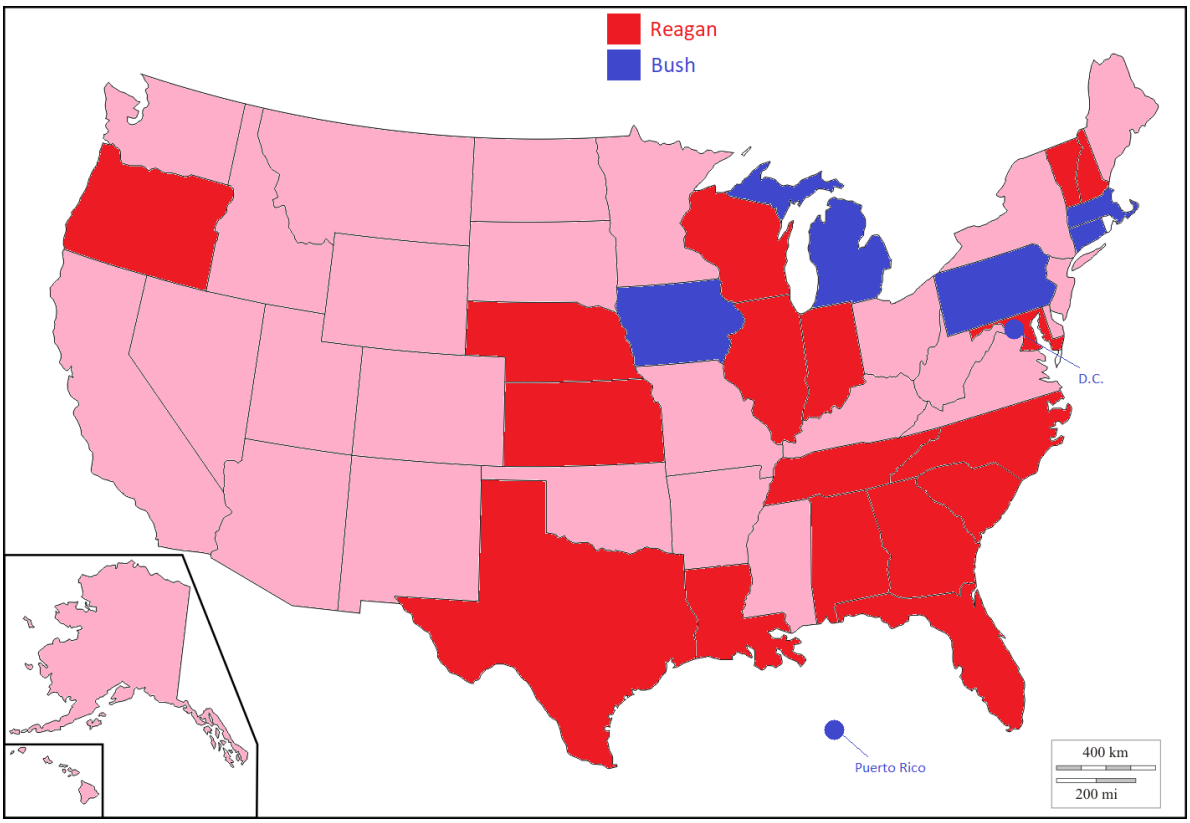
State	Class	Gun Control	Pro-gun	# of votes	Manchin-Toomey	Grassley-Cruz	Collins-Leahy	Cornyn Amnd.	Feinstein Amnd.	Blumenthal Amnd.	Burr Amnd.
AL	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
AL	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
AK	R.D.	1	6	7	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
AK	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
AZ	U.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
AZ	U.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
AR	R.D.	1	6	7	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
AR	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
CA	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
CA	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
CO	U.D.	6	1	7	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
CO	U.D.	5	2	7	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
CT	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
CT	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
DE	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
DE	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
FL	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
FL	U.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
GA	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
GA	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
HI	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
HI	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
ID	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
ID	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
IL	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
IL	U.R.	6	1	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
IN	R.D.	1	6	7	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
IN	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
IA	R.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
IA	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
KS	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
KS	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
KY	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y

KY	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
LA	R.D.	2	5	7	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
LA	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
ME	R.D.	5	2	7	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y
ME	R.R.	2	5	7	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
MD	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MD	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MA	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MA	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MI	R.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MI	R.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MN	R.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MN	R.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
MS	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
MS	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
MO	R.D.	5	2	7	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
MO	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
MT	R.D.	2	5	7	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
MT	R.D.	2	5	7	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
NE	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
NE	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
NV	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
NV	U.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
NH	R.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
NH	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
NJ	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
NJ	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
NM	R.D.	5	2	7	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
NM	R.D.	5	2	7	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
NY	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
NY	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
NC	R.D.	2	5	7	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
NC	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
ND	R.D.	1	6	7	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
ND	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
OH	R.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N

OH	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
OK	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
OK	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
OR	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
OR	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
PA	R.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
PA	R.R.	1	6	7	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
RI	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
RI	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
SC	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
SC	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
SD	R.D.	6	1	7	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
SD	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
TN	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
TN	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
TX	U.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
TX	U.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
UT	U.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
UT	U.R.	1	6	7	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
VT	R.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
VT	R.D.	6	1	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
VA	R.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
VA	R.D.	2	5	7	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
WA	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
WA	U.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
WV	R.D.	4	3	7	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
WV	R.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
WI	R.D.	7	0	7	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
WI	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
WY	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
WY	R.R.	0	7	7	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y

Y = Voted 'yay' (blue amendments/bills are pro-gun control)
N = Voted 'nay' (red amendments/bills are pro-gun)
N.V. = Not Voting
R.R. = Rural Republican, U.R. = Urban Republican, R.D. = Rural Democrat, U.D. = Urban Democrat

Illustration A2 – 1980 Republican Primary



Blue: States won by George Bush, incl. Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C.

Red: States won by Ronald Reagan

Pink: States won by Ronald Reagan after Bush suspended his campaign

Source: Kalb (2015).

Illustration of my own making.

Table A3 – All post-reform Republican nominees and their homes states and regions

1976	Gerald Ford	Michigan	Midwest
1980	Ronald Reagan	California	West
1988	George Bush	Texas	South
1996	Bob Dole	Kansas	Midwest
2000	George W. Bush	Texas	South
2008	John McCain	Arizona	West
2012	Mitt Romney	Massachusetts	North East
2016	Donald J. Trump	New York	North East

Source: Kalb (2015).

Henrik Ø. Heldahl

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