



## **Not Your Grandfather's NRA: The NRA's Radical Transformation and Embrace of an Extreme and Dangerous Agenda**

**Bottom Line:** Recent polling revealed that two-thirds of gun owners think that the National Rifle Association is an organization “overtaken by lobbyists and the interests of gun manufacturers and [has] lost its original purpose and mission.”<sup>1</sup> For good reason: Although the NRA promoted hunting, marksmanship, and responsible gun use for over a century after its founding, that organization no longer exists. The modern NRA fights against, and even calls unconstitutional, the very laws the organization once supported. The NRA is now spending more on federal elections than at any point in its history<sup>2</sup> and ceaselessly advocates for more guns everywhere, for anyone, with no questions asked—despite public opposition to these policies and research showing that they make us less safe.

- ❑ **The NRA once supported and advocated for gun background check laws, but now opposes this common-sense policy.**
  - Throughout the twentieth century, the NRA supported, and even advocated for, gun background check laws.
    - In the 1920s, future NRA President Karl T. Frederick drafted a model law that prohibited gun possession by certain dangerous people and required gun sellers to transmit detailed records to law enforcement, even imposing a waiting period to give law enforcement sufficient time to conduct a background check on the potential buyer.<sup>3</sup>
    - In the 1930s, the NRA advocated for the passage of legislation based on this model law in states across the country.<sup>4</sup>
    - President Ronald Reagan—who was the last sitting president to speak at the NRA annual convention until Donald Trump this year—called gun background checks “just plain common sense” and endorsed a 7-day waiting period for gun purchases.<sup>5</sup>
    - As recently as 1999, in the wake of the shootings at Columbine High School, NRA Executive Vice President and CEO Wayne LaPierre said, “We support the instant check [for] every sale, every gun show, no loopholes, period.”<sup>6</sup>
  - Today, however, the NRA regularly fights gun background check legislation.
    - In 2013, the NRA opposed bipartisan federal legislation that would have required background checks for online gun sales and sales at gun shows.<sup>7</sup>
    - The NRA has fought efforts in states across the country to require background checks for all gun sales, including Connecticut, Colorado, Delaware, New York, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, Maine, New Mexico, and Maryland.<sup>8</sup>
- ❑ **The NRA once advocated against “the general practice of carrying weapons,” arguing that carrying guns in public should “be sharply restricted.” Now the NRA fights to eliminate common-sense safety standards for public carry and claims that the very laws the organization once supported are unconstitutional.**
  - The NRA once advocated against unfettered public carry.
    - In the 1920s, future NRA President Karl T. Frederick drafted a model law that required a person who wanted to carry a concealed gun in public to get a permit, submit fingerprints and show good cause why the permit should be granted.



- In the 1930s, the NRA advocated for the passage of legislation based on this model law in states across the country.
- In testimony before Congress in the 1930s, NRA leaders stated that they “never believed in the general practice of carrying weapons,” and that carrying guns should “be sharply restricted and under licenses.”<sup>9</sup>
- The modern NRA, however, works to roll back or eliminate state concealed carry permit systems, and even argues in court that “good cause” requirements are unconstitutional.
  - **Permitless Carry:** The NRA advocates for state laws to eliminate the need to get a permit and safety training to carry a concealed, loaded gun in public.<sup>10</sup> This dangerous legislation would, in many states, even authorize people with violent criminal histories to carry guns in public.<sup>11</sup>
  - **Concealed Carry Reciprocity:** Congress is currently considering dangerous, NRA-sponsored legislation that would override state law and force each state to recognize the concealed carry standards from every other state, even those with dramatically weaker standards—or no standards at all. The state with the weakest law would set the standard for the country, and states and cities with otherwise strong gun laws would have to let convicted stalkers, people with violent histories, and those with no prior safety training carry hidden, loaded guns.
  - **Attacking State Laws in Court:** The NRA has filed briefs in cases across the country arguing that states with strong standards for issuing public carry permits violate the Second Amendment, including the “good cause” requirements they once supported.<sup>12</sup>
- ❑ **The NRA previously advocated to prohibit guns in schools, but now pushes for laws across the country that would force guns into K-12 schools and onto college campuses.**
  - In 1999, at the NRA annual meeting, the NRA Executive Vice President and CEO Wayne LaPierre stated, “We believe in absolutely, gun-free, zero-tolerance, totally safe schools. That means no guns in America’s schools period with the rare exception of law enforcement officers and trained security personnel.”<sup>13</sup>
  - But in the last several years, the NRA has drafted and fought for passage of dozens of bills that would force or allow guns into K-12 schools or onto college campuses.<sup>14</sup>
- ❑ **The modern, radicalized NRA now fights common-sense measures to prevent gun violence and instead pushes an agenda of guns everywhere, for anyone, with no questions asked.**
  - Instead of supporting policies that help to save lives like requiring background checks for all gun sales and requiring a permit to carry concealed guns in public, the NRA now pursues an extreme, guns everywhere agenda at both the state and federal levels. This agenda includes:
    - **Arming felons:** Federal law and the law of most states bar individuals with felony convictions from purchasing or possessing guns.<sup>15</sup> But the NRA has lobbied at both the federal and state level to let convicted violent felons immediately overturn these prohibitions and access guns.<sup>16</sup>
    - **Arming domestic abusers:** The presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation makes it five times more likely that a woman will be killed.<sup>17</sup> Research has shown keeping guns from domestic abusers is an effective way to reduce intimate partner homicides.<sup>18</sup> But the NRA has repeatedly opposed state legislation aimed at ensuring that prohibited domestic abusers do not have access to guns. This year alone, the NRA has opposed legislation in Arkansas, Missouri, and Utah that would keep guns from violent abusers.<sup>19</sup>



- **Preventing doctors from talking to their patients about gun safety:** The NRA supported legislation in Florida that prevented doctors from discussing gun safety and the potential health risks of gun ownership with their patients.<sup>20</sup> A federal appeals court recently struck down this gag order law as unconstitutional.<sup>21</sup>
- **Stifling gun violence research:** The NRA has successfully lobbied for federal legislation that restricts funding to the Centers for Disease Control for gun-violence related research, even though gun violence is a public health crisis that kills 93 Americans per day.<sup>22</sup>
- **Hindering efforts to prevent suicide by military service members:** In the face of an epidemic of gun suicides among U.S. military service members, the NRA even managed briefly to prevent military commanders from discussing gun safety with soldiers whom they believe are most likely to hurt themselves.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, a group of military leaders and suicide prevention advocates was able to lobby Congress to rescind this dangerous gag order.<sup>24</sup>
- **Enforcing current law:** To distract from its unwillingness to help address the epidemic of gun violence in this country, the NRA often calls on lawmakers to “enforce existing gun laws.”<sup>25</sup> But when legislators in Tennessee and New Hampshire proposed to do just that—by giving law enforcement the tools to go after criminals who violate current law and try to buy guns—the NRA actively undermined passage of these bills.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/04/25/poll-gun-owners-nra-237564>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thetrace.org/2016/05/nra-election-campaign-spending/>

<sup>3</sup> See Charles V. Imlay, *The Uniform Firearms Act*, 12 A.B.A. J. 767, 767 (1926).

<sup>4</sup> See 1931 Pa. Laws 497; 1935 S.D. Sess. Laws 355; 1935 Wash. Sess. Laws 599; 1936 Ala. Laws 51; 47 Stat. 650 (1932);

<sup>5</sup> Steven A. Holmes, “Gun Control Bill Backed by Reagan in Appeal to Bush,” *NY Times*, March 29, 1991; Ronald Reagan, “Why I’m for the Brady bill,” *N.Y. Times*, March 29, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.c-span.org/video/?123900-1/gun-control-legislation> (exchange beginning at 3:41:25).

<sup>7</sup> <http://bit.ly/2oKwajr>.

<sup>8</sup> See CT SB 1160 (2013), <http://bit.ly/2pAsAxm>; CO HB 1229 (2013), <http://bit.ly/2q7bBj8>; DE HB 35 (2013), <http://bit.ly/2q7qGBC>; NY SB 2230 (2013), <http://bit.ly/2oxGmk7>; WA I-594 (2014) <http://bit.ly/2q72vTr>; OR SB 941 (2015), <http://bit.ly/2oKpvps>; NV Question 1 (2016), <https://www.votenoquestion1.com>; ME Question 3 (2016), <https://www.votenoquestion3.org>; NM SB 48 / HB 50 (2016), <http://bit.ly/2oxMyZx>; MD SB 948 (2017), <http://bit.ly/2q78lUO>.

<sup>9</sup> Adam Winkler, *Gunfight: The Battle over the Right to Bear Arms in America 210-11* (WW. Norton 2011).

<sup>10</sup> See WV HB 4145 (2016), <http://bit.ly/2p5bndO>; see also NH SB 12 (2017), <http://bit.ly/2q7x8bi>.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. ND HB 1169 (2017), <http://bit.ly/2qg8nZV>.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g. Brief for the NRA as Amicus Curiae, *Peruta v. California*, No. 16-894 (U.S. 2017).

<sup>13</sup> <http://rol.st/1Uft0tm>.

<sup>14</sup> See e.g. AR HB 1249 (2017), <http://bit.ly/2pjsXcq>, GA HB 280, <http://bit.ly/2pADbbD>; see also <http://bit.ly/2j3cfMW>.

<sup>15</sup> 18 U.S.C. 922 (g).

<sup>16</sup> See Dave Hardy, “No Surrender: The straight skinny on the Firearms Owners’ Protection Act (FOPA) the law that saved gun rights,” NRA-ILA.org, Jan. 25, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> J.C. Campbell, D. Webster, J. Koziol-McLain, et al., “Risk Factors For Femicide In Abusive Relationships: Results From A Multisite Case Control Study,” 93 *Amer. J. of Public Health* 1089-97 (2002).

<sup>18</sup> April Zeoli and Daniel Webster, “Effects of domestic violence policies, alcohol taxes and police staffing levels on intimate partner homicide in large US cities,” *Journal of Injury Prevention*, 2010, available at <http://1.usa.gov/1lqT58h>.

<sup>19</sup> See AR HB 1629 (2017), <http://bit.ly/2oxWaDB>; MO HB 766 (2017), <http://bit.ly/2pAyzSN>; UT SB 237 (2017), <http://bit.ly/2pAEg31>.

<sup>20</sup> See FL HB Bill 155 (2001).

<sup>21</sup> <http://every.tw/2oNbWGN>.

<sup>22</sup> “Fatal Injury Reports,” *Injury Prevention & Control: Data & Statistics* (WISQARS), accessed January 3, 2017, <http://1.usa.gov/1pIXBux>.

<sup>23</sup> NRA-ILA, “Sen. Inhofe Introduces Legislation to Protect Second Amendment Rights of Military and Dept. of Defense Civilian Personnel,” May 28, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> See Stephanie Gaskell, “Bloomberg taps retired military brass in war on illegal guns,” *Politico*, Mar. 6, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> <http://bit.ly/2pADK5e>.