

Donald Trump: NRA Puppet



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The NRA, which is now at risk of being dismantled over allegations of massive fraud and abuse, owns Donald Trump. In fact, they spent more on Trump's election than any President in modern history. The \$30 million shelled out by the NRA in the 2016 presidential cycle was more than double the amount they spent on behalf of the Romney campaign in 2012, three times the amount they spent in total on the 2008 presidential race, and more than half the \$54 million they spent on political expenditures in the 2016 cycle in full.^{1 2} With that in mind, it's clear why we've never had a president who caves harder or faster to them, and it's obvious why there is no daylight between their views and his. Throughout his time in office, Trump has made it perfectly clear that he doesn't have his own perspective on gun safety, he simply does what the NRA tells him to do.

A passing glance at his record makes this abundantly clear. From the earliest days of the Trump campaign, to his response to tragedy after tragedy, the NRA has clearly bought and paid for the right to dictate gun policy to the President of the United States with an

uncompromising and iron fist. And unless we do something to change the status quo, they'll continue to spend to keep their puppet in the White House.

2017

- **Loosened Background Checks:** Almost immediately after he was sworn into office, Trump began doing the NRA's bidding. In his first full month as president, Trump rubber-stamped an NRA-backed repeal of an Obama-era regulation that prohibited individuals with severe mental illnesses from purchasing a weapon. It's estimated that because of Trump's actions, more than 400,000 records that could have prevented guns from falling into the wrong hands never made it into the system. ³
- **Made it Easier for Fugitives to Obtain Weapons:** In March of the same year, Trump's DOJ issued a directive to the FBI, modifying who qualifies as a "fugitive from justice," making it easier for many individuals with outstanding arrest warrants to buy firearms legally. ⁴ The results were disastrous. In the first six months following the issuance of the policy, the denial rate for gun purchases by fugitives fell by 80 percent nationwide. ⁵
- **Supported Silencer Deregulation:** Just one month before the deadliest mass shooting in modern history, where a gunman used a series of high-powered weapons and silencers to kill 59 people and injure nearly 900 others, Republicans in Congress introduced a bill to ease restrictions on—silencers. In a memo backing the bill, the NRA flexed its control over the GOP, calling Trump a "friend" to the legislation and the organization. ⁶

2018

- **Lied to Parkland Families:** In a pattern that would repeat itself over the remainder of his term, Trump spent the days following the Parkland shooting promising action on gun safety, and against the gun lobby, then did nothing. Five days after the massacre, Trump said he was "supportive of efforts to improve the federal background check system." ⁷ He later also personally told survivors, in a televised event, that his administration would be "very strong on background checks," while publicly endorsing a higher age requirement for the purchase of an assault weapons. ⁸ And in a rare moment of honesty, Trump admitted that Congressional Republicans were "scared of the NRA," but assured the country that he would get something "powerful" done on background checks. ⁹ But, after a weekend lunch and stern dressing down from top NRA officials, Trump cowered and his support for any action to prevent future tragedies like Parkland swiftly vanished. ¹⁰

2019

- **Fought Against Closing the Charlestown Loophole:** After two years of Republican control of the White House and both houses of Congress, Democrats won a majority in the House of Representatives and swiftly passed gun safety legislation that would expand background checks and closed dangerous gaps in our laws, like the Charlestown loophole that allows firearms to be transferred by licensed gun dealers before required background checks have a chance to be completed and resulted in the Charleston AME church shooting in 2015.¹¹ Trump immediately threatened to veto any legislation that made it past the Senate.¹²
- **Lied to the American People:** Later in the year, as back-to-back mass shootings in Texas and Ohio gripped the nation, Trump once again announced that he intended to do something “very meaningful” about background checks. At least somewhat aware of the public’s skepticism following his flip-flop a year earlier, Trump told the country that this time would be different, because of his greater “influence” over Congress—despite the fact that Democrats now actually controlled one chamber in Congress. But once again, after a scolding from the NRA and its President Wayne LaPierre, Trump backed down, telling reporters, “I’m very, very concerned with the Second Amendment, more so than most presidents would be,” and added for good measure, “people don’t realize we have very strong background checks right now.”¹³

2020

- **Eased Restrictions on Exporting Firearms:** Trump has continued his groveling to the NRA in this election year, rolling back key administrative rules from the Obama administration. In January, Trump greenlighted a rule change that makes it easier to export firearms from the United States. Experts have warned that the change will ultimately pose a serious global security threat.¹⁴
- **Fought Against State-Led Gun Safety Reform:** And with Trump desperate to move the conversation away from his failed management of COVID-19 and an ailing economy, he’s tried to move guns to the center of the 2020 campaign. On top of designating gun shops, shooting ranges, and weapon manufacturers as “essential businesses,” he’s used multiple White House briefings intended to update the nation on the pandemic to slam states that have passed reasonable, effective, and popular gun safety legislation—the same kinds of reforms he’s publicly supported before being reprimanded by the NRA.¹⁵ ¹⁶

Conclusion

Throughout his presidency, Donald Trump has proven that the executive board at the NRA is the only domestic constituency that has his loyalty when it comes to gun policy. Common sense gun safety reform is supported by a record high of Americans, and that includes gun

owners.¹⁷ Yet the political debate in Washington around gun safety measures is no longer a discussion between well-meaning and good faith actors on both sides—it’s a fight between those that stand to profit from the sale of firearms and a public that is sick of watching its friends, family, and neighbors die because of gun violence.

We have a president who is too weak to stand up to the gun lobby that bought him with record campaign contributions in 2016, and we pay the price for it every single day. It’s time to cut the strings and begin a new day in America.

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