

Why the NRA Badly Wants Donald Trump to Be President



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“There is not a difference between what Mr. Trump is saying and what the NRA’s position is.”

–Chris Cox, the National Rifle Association’s head lobbyist ¹

“The NRA just has the absolute best interest of our country. They just want to make the right decision. These are great people, great Americans.”

–Donald Trump, Republican nominee for president ²

In an unusually early move, the National Rifle Association (NRA) endorsed Donald Trump for President back in May, five months earlier than it did either John McCain or Mitt Romney in the last two presidential elections. ³ It’s no secret as to why: a Trump presidency would be a dream come true for the NRA. After all, Trump has promised to “save your Second Amendment,” saying that “nobody loves it more than us.” ⁴ And if you believe what Trump says, he not only closely follows the NRA’s party line, he sometimes pushes *even further*. In particular, three of Trump’s ideas on guns would make our nation wildly less safe: his proposals to arm everyone, end gun-free zones, and establish an unfettered right to carry a concealed firearm nationwide.

#1: Arming Everyone

What Trump would do

Donald Trump’s solution to the epidemic of gun violence in this country is straight out of the NRA’s playbook: more guns. “If you had more guns, you’d have more protection because the right people would have the guns,” he said on *Meet the Press* in October. ⁵ In fact, one of his main policy proposals appears to be arming just about everyone, including:

- **Teachers:** After the shooting that killed nine people at Umpqua Community College in Oregon, Trump said, “If you had a couple teachers with guns in that room, you would have been a hell of a lot better off.”⁶ That’s going even further than the NRA did after the Sandy Hook shooting—which left twenty first-graders and six educators dead—when it called for armed police and security officers in schools (as opposed to arming teachers in every classroom).⁷ Trump appeared to try to walk this position back a couple of times, including by couching it as “trained” teachers and by saying, “I don’t want to have guns in classrooms.”⁸ But as he concluded that sentence with, “...although in some cases teachers should have guns in classrooms, frankly,” what exactly his policy is—and where he would draw the line—remains somewhat unclear.⁹
- **Bar-goers:** In response to the worst mass shooting in our nation’s history at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, Trump told CNN that “if you had guns in that room, if you had—even if you had a number of people having them strapped to their ankle or strapped to their waist where bullets could have flown in the other direction right at him, you wouldn’t have had that tragedy.”¹⁰ The NRA does support allowing guns in bars—and its lobbyists have fought against state laws that would prohibit them—but it didn’t go as far as Trump, saying instead that people who are drinking should not be carrying firearms.¹¹ After garnering significant criticism for his comments, Trump rapidly altered course to align with the NRA, tweeting that “[w]hen I said that if, within the Orlando club, you had some people with guns, I was obviously talking about additional guards or employees.”¹² But the limitations of his “more guns in bars” policies still aren’t clear.

- **People on the terrorist watch list:** For a brief moment in June, it looked as if Trump might be considering breaking from the NRA over the idea of prohibiting people on the terrorist watch list from purchasing guns. It was short-lived, however, as the NRA acted quickly to reassert control over their chosen candidate. It took only four days before Trump reversed course to adhere to the NRA position, saying he “understands exactly their concerns” and parroting the organization’s talking points in opposition to closing the terror gap.¹³

While the NRA has long advocated that the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun, even its strident spokespeople haven’t been as blatant as Trump in their calls for arming civilians.

What those policies would mean

Arming Americans *en mass* and without discretion would not make us safer—and in some cases it would make it harder to differentiate between the good guys and the bad guys. When Congresswoman Gabby Giffords (D-AZ) and eighteen other people were shot in Tucson, Arizona, an armed civilian was nearby and rushed to the scene to help. But when he got there, he almost shot the wrong man—the man who had tackled the shooter and taken his gun away from him.¹⁴ And it’s not just Good Samaritans who would struggle—Trump’s policies would also make law enforcement’s job harder. Just ask Dallas Police Chief David Brown, whose city is in an open-carry state. In the wake of protests and police shootings, Chief Brown said, “It’s increasingly challenging when people have AR-15s slung over their shoulder and they’re in a crowd. We don’t know who the good guy is versus the bad guy when everyone starts shooting.”¹⁵ If Trump is elected President, that would be the reality for every police officer, bystander, and parent, every day.

More openly-armed civilians in a Trump presidency would also mean more guns in public, and likely more guns left in places where they shouldn’t be. What if armed teachers or bar-goers made the same mistake that Capitol Hill police

officers made three times in a three-month period last year, forgetting their guns and leaving them unattended—one of which was found by a child?¹⁶ How many more children will find guns unsecured in their parents' purse or car and kill themselves or others, like they did in Indiana and Wisconsin just days apart in April?¹⁷ And how many people will be accidentally caught in the crosshairs when a good guy with a gun—but without training—starts shooting in public, returning fire or even starting it because he or she was mistaken? Americans have a Second Amendment right to bear arms—but that right does not mean anyone should be able to carry a loaded gun anywhere without regard for the safety of others, that teachers should have guns in their classrooms, that people drinking at a nightclub should have guns on their hips, or that terrorists should be able to legally purchase deadly weapons.

2: Outlawing Gun-Free Zones

What Trump would do

At a CNBC Republican presidential primary debate last year, Trump called gun-free zones “feeding frenzies for sick people” and “target practice for the sickos.”¹⁸ That sounds remarkably similar to the NRA’s position on gun-free zones, which is that they are “the worst and most dangerous of all lies” and “tell every insane killer” the “safest place to inflict maximum mayhem with minimum risk.”¹⁹ Trump has promised to do away with all gun-free zones, proclaiming at a rally in Vermont that “my first day, it gets signed, OK? My first day. There's no more gun-free zones.”²⁰ When pressed on allowing guns in schools, he later attempted to clarify by saying only “in some cases” would schools’ gun-free zones be outlawed, though what those cases are is unknown since he also reiterated his support for arming at least some teachers.²¹ It’s unclear what exactly Trump means when he refers to gun-free zones—whether he means places where it is illegal to carry a weapon under federal and/or state law, or whether he’s including privately-owned establishments that have policies prohibiting guns. Nor is it clear whether he’s

promising to do away only with federal laws that establish gun-free zones—like the *Gun-Free School Zones Act* first signed by President George H.W. Bush—or whether he would also try to use his executive power to prohibit states and localities from passing or enforcing their own laws. But what is clear is that the only people who would be happy with his policy are NRA lobbyists.

What those policies would mean

If Trump's proposal were enacted and gun-free zones were banned, it wouldn't make us any safer. He and the NRA are wrong when they say that gun-free zones are "bait" for mass shooters.²² There's no evidence that shooters choose their locations based on gun policies, nor that gun-free zones are less safe than other places.²³ A study of every mass shooting that occurred between January 2009 and July 2014 found that only 13% took place entirely in gun-free zones.²⁴ In fact, *more guns tends to lead to more violence.*²⁵

At the very least, taken seriously, Trump's plan would allow guns in school zones and government facilities such as court houses, post offices, prisons, and federal buildings like those that house veterans' services. If he extended his ban on gun-free zones to override state and local laws, that would mean states and localities could no longer choose to prohibit guns in places like day cares, churches, hospitals, domestic violence shelters, sports games, or funerals. Not every state or locality draws the same lines, but right now it is up to communities to determine for themselves where guns can and can't be legally carried. Trump could even attempt to go as far as prohibiting private property owners and small businesses—like concert venues or bars—from establishing their own policies about whether to allow guns on their premises or not. A Trump presidency would undermine the rights of states, localities, and private property owners by prohibiting them from making that determination about how best to keep their communities safe.

#3: Establishing an Unfettered Right to Carry a Concealed Firearm Nationwide

What Trump would do

Donald Trump speaks often of his concealed carry permit, a permit (presumably) issued by New York—his state of residency—that allows him to carry a concealed gun within that state because he satisfied certain requirements. In New York, those requirements include being at least 21 years old and not subject to a protective (restraining) order.²⁶ But every state's rules are different. Some offer permits to teenagers, people who have been convicted of violent crimes, convicted stalkers, or even certain domestic abusers. In fact, there are states that don't require a permit at all to carry a concealed weapon and there are states that issue permits to out-of-state residents who can't qualify for one at home. Up until now, each state could set its own rules and decide what the laws are within its own jurisdiction. But under Trump's proposal for national reciprocity, he says that "a concealed carry permit should work in every state"—meaning that every state would be forced to honor a concealed carry permit issued in any other.²⁷ And the NRA heartily agrees. It has long lobbied for federal legislation that would do just that.²⁸

Trump's advocacy for "reciprocity" or the ability to use a concealed carry permit from any state anywhere in the country is reason enough for the NRA to love him. But he goes even further. According to Trump's website, carrying a concealed weapon is "a right, not a privilege."²⁹ Yet the NRA has been careful to dodge that question in their many legal challenges to gun laws across the country. In fact, a recent article on its website refers to whether concealed carry is a right as the "question no one asked."³⁰ No one asked Trump either, but he's happy to answer it—in a way that's beyond the NRA's wildest hopes and dreams.

What those policies would mean

Trump's take on concealed carry as an unfettered right would constitute a major expansion of the Second Amendment, and considering the impact the next President is expected to have on the make-up of the Supreme Court, that's no small threat. To date, the Supreme Court has affirmed that the Second Amendment establishes an individual right to bear arms—but even conservative giant Justice Antonin Scalia (whose seat the next President will fill) wrote that “the right secured by the Second Amendment is not unlimited.”³¹ Currently, most courts read those limitations to include a state's right to determine what requirements must be met for someone to carry a concealed weapon within their borders. Just this summer, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals determined *en banc* (in a case heard before all of its eleven members) that there is no constitutional right to carry a concealed gun.³² But all of that could change if Trump is elected president and is given keys to the Supreme Court.

A President Trump wouldn't just reinterpret the Second Amendment to make carrying a concealed firearm an unrestricted right—by establishing national reciprocity for concealed carry permits from any state, he'd effectively rewrite state gun laws to the lowest common denominator, putting states with strong laws at the mercy of those with weak ones. For a nominee whose party purports to support states' rights, that's hypocrisy of the highest order. It would mean that no state could protect itself or its people from someone who took advantage of lax laws elsewhere to obtain a permit for which they would never qualify in that state. And for the NRA, it would mean the biggest victory since gaining immunity from suits for gun manufacturers and sellers more than a decade ago.

Conclusion

A Donald Trump presidency would be a dream come true for the NRA. He not only supports the policies for which the organization advocates and kowtows to its will, but in some places he goes even further, offering a version of gun laws so extreme the NRA hasn't dared to publically espouse it. If

elected President, Trump and his NRA allies can be expected to move quickly to try and arm vast new swaths of the American citizenry, overturn state and federal laws that establish gun-free zones in places like schools and hospitals, and radically reinterpret the Second Amendment to establish a constitutional right to carry a concealed gun anywhere in the country without restriction. Trump's campaign rhetoric may be scary and extreme, but if enacted, his gun policies would be far, far worse.

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