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< Poll: Americans, Including Republicans And Gun Owners, Broadly Support Red Flag Laws

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SCOTT DETROW, HOST:

Hey, everybody. Before we start the show, I want to let you in on something really exciting. We are taking the podcast on the road. We'll be in Boulder, Colo., on September 20 and Washington, D.C., on November 8. We'll be taping a podcast live on stage so you can see how all this magic happens. Get a ticket at nprpresents.org.

LUKE: Hi, this is Luke (ph)...

KATE: And Kate (ph).

LUKE: ...In Columbus, Ohio. Kate is the political scientist who turned me into a huge fan of this show, and we just got married.

KATE: This podcast was recorded at...

DETROW: It is 12:40 Eastern on Tuesday, August 20.

KATE: Things may have changed by the time you hear this. Keep up with all of NPR's political coverage on npr.org, on the NPR One app and on your local public radio

station.

LUKE AND KATE: All right, here's the show.

(SOUNDBITE OF THE BIGTOP ORCHESTRA'S "TEETER BOARD: FOLIES BERGERE (MARCH AND TWO-STEP)")

DETROW: Congratulations, guys.

DOMENICO MONTANARO, BYLINE: That was great.

DETROW: I liked it. I liked it.

MONTANARO: That's really sweet.

DETROW: Hey there. It's the NPR POLITICS PODCAST. I'm Scott Detrow. I cover politics.

MONTANARO: I'm Domenico Montanaro, political editor.

CLAUDIA GRISALES, BYLINE: And I'm Claudia Grisales, congressional reporter.

DETROW: Claudia, it is our first podcast together.

GRISALES: Very excited.

DETROW: So even as President Trump starts to back away from calls for more background checks, it is clear guns are going to be a big point of discussion when Congress returns in a few weeks. We have a new survey that tells us a lot about how Americans feel about measures to curb gun violence. Domenico, this is not the usual poll that we're talking about when we're in the podcast studio talking about a new poll we've got.

MONTANARO: And if you thought our regular poll had a long title, just wait for this one.

DETROW: Which it does. And this one's even longer.

(LAUGHTER)

MONTANARO: So this survey was done by APM Research Lab, American Public Media, which is within the public media family. It is done in conjunction with two reporting projects in public media called Guns & America and Call to Mind.

DETROW: That is a long poll title.

MONTANARO: Yeah, that is.

DETROW: That is the end of the podcast.

MONTANARO: Yeah, we're done.

(LAUGHTER)

DETROW: What did we learn?

MONTANARO: Well, broadly speaking here, this was a poll that was on red flag laws - those Extreme Risk Protection Orders - and it found broad support among, you know, Democrats, independents, Republicans, gun owners, who said that they're in favor of police initiating these protective orders and family initiating these protective orders.

DETROW: And especially with all the terminology of the poll itself...

GRISALES: Right.

DETROW: ...Can we just get a quick refresher on what red flag laws are?

GRISALES: Well, the name alone can give you a hint. It basically is a red flag that you can call on a relative, a friend, or it could be a law enforcement official, who can petition a court - could be federal, could be state - to get involved in a case where there's an individual who has a firearm, and there's concern that that firearm could be used to harm themselves or someone else and petition to have this weapon removed from this individual.

DETROW: And this is something that Republicans have talked a lot about as a countermeasure almost to the background checks and other - and assault weapons bans...

GRISALES: Right.

DETROW: ...That Democrats have really been prioritizing.

GRISALES: Right.

MONTANARO: Well, and this poll found that overall 77% of people, more than three-quarters, said that they were in favor of allowing a family member to seek one of these court orders to temporarily take away guns from someone who they feel that gun owner might harm themselves or others. When you look down the list, 70% of Republicans in favor, 76% of independents, 85% of Democrats.

And it's a similar story when it was talking about police trying to seek this out - slightly lower. Seventy percent among people overall, two-thirds of Republicans. And when you look at gun owners, it's interesting - 60 percent of gun owners say that they would be in favor of police initiating one of these protective orders.

DETROW: And one thing that's worth flagging is that this survey was completed before the last round...

MONTANARO: That's right.

DETROW: ...Of mass shootings, which really elevated this conversation yet again.

MONTANARO: Sometimes right after these kinds of mass shootings or events, you'll see a spike in support in some polls right after an event like that. So it's interesting and noteworthy that this happened before those even took place.

GRISALES: Domenico, what else stood out to you in the poll?

MONTANARO: Well, you know, look - there were a few different things in here where there were some differences among some of these groups. You know, broadly, people are in favor of it, but you see women far more in favor of these red flag laws. You see

an increase in educational attainment really is significant when it comes to whether or not people are in favor of these protection orders.

And there are regional differences as well. People in the West are still a majority in favor of these - of families or police seeking these protection orders, but less in favor than in the rest of the country.

DETROW: Now, Claudia, you were on the ground reporting in a key swing district in Texas on how the conversation has shifted in the wake of shootings in El Paso, in Dayton, and let's not forget the one in California that happened right before those two. What did you find?

GRISALES: Right. It was really interesting going back there. It's an area I grew up in. It's a suburb of Houston, Fort Bend County. I grew up in the Sugar Land area. When I grew up, it was a very red district, and people were very protective about issues like their guns and holding onto their guns. And coming back to that area more than 20 years later and seeing the transformation of this community, it's more diverse now and kind of a rainbow coalition, if you will, just representing a lot of ethnicities.

And so we visited a gun range in Fort Bend County and walked in, and there were several gentlemen standing there, and introduced ourselves. And we met Tom (ph). He was there with some friends, apparently. And he said, I'm an NRA member. I've been a longtime member, and I don't think they're doing a good job representing us.

TOM: They've become far too strident in Second Amendment - more guns, screw everybody else. And I'm a life member of the NRA. So I don't think they're doing a good job representing us. I, personally - this is really going to get me in trouble. I, personally, don't have any need for the AR- and AK-style weapons.

GRISALES: So we should note that we only have Tom's first name because he has some concerns of sharing his last name, and that's how strong that fear is of contradicting the NRA in the public - can be that you don't want to give your last name.

MONTANARO: You know, we shouldn't say, based on one anecdote, to extrapolate out that...

GRISALES: Right.

MONTANARO: ...That is reflective of the entirety of NRA members and gun owners. But there is a feeling that there's a gap between how the NRA is representing all gun members. Now, one thing that President Trump noted is that when he talks to the NRA, they don't want to give anything because they feel like if you give an inch, it's going to open the dam.

DETROW: Yeah. But one reason you were in that district is that the suburbs have been such a key battleground. The Houston suburbs, suburbs all over the country...

GRISALES: Right.

DETROW: ...Are where Democrats made a ton of gains in 2018 in House races and really feel like they can win the presidential race next year. Did you find anything else in this district about how the gun conversation is resonating or not resonating with voters?

GRISALES: It seems that at least with the kind of representation they've had - Pete Olson, who recently announced this would be his last term as a Republican representing this district that had been once represented by Tom DeLay, one of the top Republicans in the House. And it's kind of had this history in terms of Republicans representing it.

But what we ran into were voters who no longer see that kind of red when they go to the voting booth. They want to see Democrats who they feel are more open about talking about these gun measures. They are shifting to these Democratic lawmakers and leaders to see the change that they hope to see happen when it comes to gun control.

DETROW: And Domenico, on the presidential level, we've seen so many candidates really lean into these aggressive gun control policies that for a generation we saw Democrats avoid. Vice President Joe Biden last week was writing op-eds advocating

for a return to an assault weapons ban. It seems like Democrats really read polls like this one and feel like the public is more on their side than the NRA side, than the Republican side.

MONTANARO: You know, this isn't the 1990s anymore. The fact of the matter is...

DETROW: Don't tell some of the people running for president that.

MONTANARO: And a lot of our pop culture.

(LAUGHTER)

MONTANARO: I understand that. But I'm just going to say that when it comes to the gun issue, there are not that many Democrats and swing voters anymore who make Democrats feel afraid of not being strongly in favor of gun rights, where you had a lot of Democrats in the 1990s, especially in swing areas, especially in center right areas, where they were very pro-gun.

I mean, this was - it was seen as a good way to win election in a swing kind of district. They're clearly not afraid of this issue anymore, and I think that's an important sea change in our politics. One reason for that is how much money is now behind a lot of the advocacy groups against some of - expansions of gun rights and more in favor of these gun restrictions.

DETROW: And we should note that there are a couple of congressional Republicans who have come out in favor of an assault weapons ban - Pete King and Brian Mast from Florida, among others.

GRISALES: Another Republican who's come out in favor of these assault rifle bans is Representative Mike Turner, former mayor of Dayton. His daughter was on the scene of the shooting that night. And two days later, he came forward and said he was for a series of measures, including a ban on assault rifles.

MONTANARO: And significant because he was endorsed by the NRA before his 2018 reelection.

GRISALES: Correct.

DETROW: I'll say this - it is always the 1990s in my Spotify account.

(LAUGHTER)

DETROW: All right, we're...

MONTANARO: Got to move on, man.

DETROW: No, never.

MONTANARO: There's so much good stuff.

DETROW: All right, we're going to take a quick break. And when we come back, we will talk about how all of this could play out when Congress returns in a few weeks.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

DETROW: We are back. And after those shootings, many Democrats were urging Congress to come back early or even cancel the remainder of the August recess. That didn't really happen. But, Claudia, I guess a House committee is coming back a little early to start working on this?

GRISALES: Yes. They're coming back about a week early. House Judiciary is coming back to consider several gun measures ahead of the full House convening. And it's kind of their way - Democrats, if you will - making their mark on - we're working on this issue, we're trying to get something done at least on our end.

DETROW: And earlier this year, we had already seen the House - which, of course, is now controlled by Democrats - vote on background checks for the first time in years. What particular bills are they teeing up for voting later this year?

GRISALES: Well, there's several measures that are moving in the House. One bill in particular - it's a Democratic bill - has about 190 co-sponsors. And that would ban assault weapons. And the first Republican, Representative King of New York, said he

would sign on to the bill - actually, he did on the 16. So he's also one of those supporting this ban.

DETROW: But, Domenico, the Republican whose voice matters the most on this is President Trump. As he often has before, after those shootings, he seemed to indicate an openness to support background check legislation. And as he has before, he's already kind of backing off that, isn't he?

MONTANARO: He is. I mean, he started talking about this after the Parkland shooting about how background checks might be necessary, that you have to take on the NRA. He did it again immediately in the aftermath of the El Paso and Dayton shootings, saying that you have to not be afraid of the NRA. He said that smart background checks were something that you want to maybe look into.

Then he had a rally last week in New Hampshire where he backed away from that. He started talking about mental illness. He even talked about institutions potentially reopening. And since then, we have not heard him talk about background checks or making a push. In fact, here's some of what he had to say earlier.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: People don't realize we have very strong background checks right now. You go in to buy a gun, you have to sign up. There are a lot of background checks that have been approved over the years.

DETROW: You know, you could talk about this with so many different issues and the president. But, you know, I know Republicans like Pennsylvania Senator Pat Toomey had been in calls with the White House, trying to see if this could be an opening to actually get a bill on the Senate floor, controlled by Republicans. It always seems hard to try and plot out legislative strategy with the president when he changes his mind so frequently.

MONTANARO: He does. And I don't think he realizes he's in the driver's seat. I mean, he could give cover to so many Republicans. As Claudia could tell you, I'm sure that there are so many Republicans who would probably get on board with some of these

things. I mean, if you think about Democratic Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, he has said that he is not going to do anything.

He's not going to have Democrats pass a quote-unquote "tepid" red flag legislation bill and then allow what he said was Republicans to just push this issue of guns aside. He wants background checks tied to that. And that doesn't seem like the way that Republicans want to move at this point, despite the fact that there are overwhelming numbers of people across party who are in favor of both of those things.

DETROW: Claudia, could you remind us what Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has said about this lately?

GRISALES: Remember - he is a long-time supporter of gun rights. And in a local radio interview, all he has committed to so far is a discussion.

MONTANARO: Do we know if McConnell himself is personally opposed to some of these things or is he making some kind of, you know, calculation between himself and the White House on what can get passed?

GRISALES: I think it's more about the calculation. I don't think he's been clear about we're opposed to this or we're for this. I think he's waiting, as you said, for President Trump to send a signal on, what do we do here? What's our next move?

DETROW: Meantime, a ton of the Democratic presidential candidates have laid out really detailed proposals on the gun front - Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, one of the most recent. And we happened to sit down with her on the NPR POLITICS PODCAST just as she was releasing her gun control plan. Her and Asma Khalid talked about that a lot. You can check out that interview in your recent feeds.

You can also check out our most recent candidate interview. It's with Andrew Yang. We're going to wrap things up for today. And we will be back in your feed as soon as there's political news that you need to know about.

I'm Scott Detrow. I cover the campaign.

MONTANARO: I'm Domenico Montanaro, political editor.

GRISALES: And I'm Claudia Grisales, congressional reporter.

DETROW: Thank you for listening to the NPR POLITICS PODCAST.

(SOUNDBITE OF THE BIGTOP ORCHESTRA'S "TEETER BOARD: FOLIES BERGERE (MARCH AND TWO-STEP)")

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