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The Influence of External Factors (Lobbyists) Regarding Major Policy Decisions on Gun Rights and How they Affect Public Impressions Regarding Federal Government

Jason M. Moore

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Jason Michael Moore

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THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL FACTORS
(LOBBYISTS) REGARDING MAJOR POLICY
DECISIONS ON GUN RIGHTS AND HOW THEY
AFFECT PUBLIC IMPRESSIONS REGARDING
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

has been read by the undersigned. It is hereby recommended for acceptance by the
faculty with credit to the amount of 3 semester hours.

Christi Scott Bartman (Date) 20 Jan 2015

Christi Scott Bartman, MPA, JD, PhD
Associate Professor
American Public University System

Recommended for approval on behalf of the program

Christi Scott Bartman (Date) 20 Jan 2015

Recommended on behalf of the program director



Digitally signed by Mark T. Riccardi
DN: cn=Mark T. Riccardi, o=American
Public University System, ou=Academics,
email=mrliccardi@apus.edu, c=US
Date: 2015.02.16 12:47:48 -0700

(Date) _____

Approved by academic dean

THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL FACTORS (LOBBYISTS)
REGARDING MAJOR POLICY DECISIONS ON GUN RIGHTS
AND HOW THEY AFFECT PUBLIC IMPRESSIONS
REGARDING FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

A Master Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

American Public University

by

Jason Michael Moore

In Partial Fulfillment of the

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of

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Charles Town, WV

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wonderful wife, Kanika and kids, Sanaa, Zora, and Xavier. They inspire me to be the best that I can be in life. All I do is for them.

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First of all, I would like to give reverence to my creator and savior for supplying me with the strength, courage, and wisdom to complete my thesis project. Through all things, God has always given me hope in my darkest hours and remained by my side. I am nothing alone, but with God, there is nothing I cannot do and accomplish.

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Running head: Influence of Lobbyists and Gun Policy

lessons they instilled in me. I thank you for providing all the love and support that only great parents like the two of you can provide.

To my kids, Sanaa, Zora, and Zavier, let this thesis project serve as a reminder that without knowledge you limit yourselves. I offer one of my favorite quotes provided by A Tribe Called Quest, “if knowledge is the key then just show me the lock.” Always aspire to do great things and help those who need it. Always aspire to learn new things daily and take yourselves out of your comfort zone. Always seek the truth with everything that you do. If you do these things there will be no door you cannot unlock. I love you and I enjoy watching you grow everyday in your own unique ways.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL FACTORS (LOBBYISTS)
REGARDING MAJOR POLICY DECISIONS ON GUN RIGHTS
AND HOW THEY AFFECT PUBLIC IMPRESSIONS
REGARDING FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

by

Jason Michael Moore

American Public University, December 2014

Charles Town, West Virginia

Professor Dr. Christi Bartman, Thesis Professor

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of how lobbyists influence gun laws and explore American attitudes towards lobbyists. This topic is important due to the recent spike in gun related massacres that are more prevalent in our society. This thesis will be part research and also utilize qualitative methodology to provide the reader with an understanding of the topic based on previous literature and new data through the use of a survey to obtain individuals' thoughts and perceptions. The research found that lobbyists' organizations utilize vast amounts of resources in order to convey their message to legislators and influence the voting outcomes of virtually all laws concerning gun rights. To state that lobbyists' influences are negative cannot be supported by the research. The research has found that whether or not an individual agrees with the influences from lobbyists in terms of gun legislation largely depends on their own political views and attitudes toward gun control. Regardless of this finding, pro-gun lobbyists have an unhealthy influence over legislators and the political institution concerning gun laws.

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Introduction

In America, the right to keep and bear arms is a sentiment that many Americans hold as an inherent right as a citizen. This right regarding gun ownership has become a major contention of debate regarding how to effectively manage and create effective laws that will keep these arms out of the hands of non-responsible individuals. With recent incidents such as Sandy Hook Elementary School, Aurora, Colorado, and Virginia Tech involving the use of guns to inflict mass casualties and deaths, the spike in public interest to create laws that will better protect communities is more prevalent. The major debate then becomes how to mitigate gun violence by restricting individuals' access to guns that should not possess them without creating legislation that would infringe on the rights of responsible gun ownership. In addition to individual rights, corporations that produce guns could potentially be affected by any potential legislation regarding gun control. This sets the stage for three interest groups. Individuals that believe any legislation geared toward gun control would infringe on their Second Amendment rights to keep and bear arms, corporations that invest in the production and sales of guns, and individuals that want more laws created with the intent to end gun massacres such as those previously mentioned. This scenario ultimately creates an interesting relationship between lobbyists, who represent the latter mentioned interests groups, and legislators who are charged with creating policy and laws.

The American populace oftentimes is perplexed at what drives major policy decisions within the Federal Government. The American public, as stakeholders, vote lawmakers into office with the understanding that these individuals will legislate consistently with their views or at the very least the majority view of the district they represent. Yet, instances arise when lawmakers simply vote solely on their own beliefs with total disregard for their constituents. Lawmakers are approached by a plethora of individuals with the sole purpose to advance a

specific agenda. These individuals have certain access to the lawmakers that normal, everyday Americans do not. These individuals are commonly known as lobbyists and they are a prevalent force in American politics and government and are a driving force working to influence the votes that lawmakers cast.

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of how lobbyists influence gun laws and to also explore American attitudes towards lobbyists' actions. This topic is important due to the recent spike in gun related massacres that are more prevalent in our society and to educate the reader regarding how the legislative process is influenced. This thesis will be part research and also utilize qualitative methodology to provide the reader with an understanding of the topic based on previous literature and new data to obtain individuals' thoughts and perceptions. First, by researching and analyzing the types of gun legislation lobbyists support and the eventual voting outcomes of those bills in relation to constituent's views, this paper will provide a basic premise of how successful or unsuccessful lobbyists are at swaying lawmaker's opinions. Another approach to add depth to this research will be soliciting individuals to complete a survey to gauge their understanding of current Virginia gun laws and how lobbyists influence gun legislation. Additionally, the survey will produce data that can be analyzed against current research regarding this specific topic in order to establish trends among gun owners and non-owners, political partisan views, and how voters feel about lobbyists' interactions with lawmakers regarding gun laws. In addition to the survey, research of current literature in reference to lobbyists' tactics will be explored to provide the reader with an understanding of how lobbyists influence legislators.

The first major question to explore involves lobbyists' activities in the legislative process and whether or not these activities successfully influence lawmakers regarding their agenda.

First, in order to understand lobbyist's roles, one must define what a lobbyist is. According to Packham (2006) "A lobbyist is defined by Merriam-Webster as one who conducts "activities aimed at influencing public officials and especially members of a legislative body on legislation,"" and those in the business of lobbying represent a wide variety of interests" (para. 1). McGrath (2007) also provides a definition for lobbyists, "Lobbying is the stimulation and transmission of a communication, by someone other than a citizen acting on his own behalf, directed to a governmental decision-maker with the hope of influencing his decision" (p. 273). Berg (2009) states,

Political scientists have long recognized the legitimate uses of lobbying in a democracy. Lobbying, as an accepted and legal process, allows the voice of citizen groups, associations, labor unions, corporations and others to be heard in the political arena. Lobbyists break down complicated issues and present the most pertinent information to legislators, staff members or committees in short documents or in quick one-on-one exchanges. This adds to the extensive research and evidence that usually accompanies proposed legislation. Increasingly, lawmakers rely on lobbyists for information (p. 2).

Regarding any political issue an argument can be made for or against legislation that will cater to the interests of specific individuals, businesses or corporations. Stringent or lenient gun laws, gun rights and anti-gun enthusiasts, and gun manufactures are not exempt from this discussion.

In regards to Packham's definition, he cites certain activities lobbyists conduct, but what are these activities? In order to effectively argue any topic, an individual must be knowledgeable and in many respects considered a subject matter expert. Bonanno (2008) states,

An effective lobbyist is an educator. Every day, a member of Congress takes action on a breadth of topics, few of which may be within his expertise. Bringing data and experts to

lawmakers to demonstrate the effects of their potential decision is the role of a lobbyist (p. 72).

Essentially, lobbyists are the subject matter experts that not only have the information and data at their disposal, but also a direct link to politicians in order to advance their agenda. Additionally, lobbyists must not only be subject matter experts regarding their agenda they hope to impose on lawmakers, but they must also be expert communicators with an impeccable ability to monitor and gauge social cues.

The second question this research will explore involves constituent's perceptions of lobbyists regarding gun law legislation. The first assumption is Americans will have an overall negative view of lobbyists. This may derive from the public's perceived negativity of government overall and that lobbyists are just another part of an already corrupt system. The second assumption involves the inherent knowledge of what lobbyists actually do or how they affect legislation may be lacking. According to Chi (1996) "there appears to be a widespread perception that some state legislators are obligated to moneyed private interest" (para. 4). These private interests come in the form of organizations such as the National Rifle Association (NRA). Organizations such as the NRA have robust amounts of monetary funds at their disposal and a strong membership backing. Most lobbying firms also sponsor Political Action Committees (PACs). Wright (1990) states,

Most scholars and political practitioners acknowledge some connection between PAC money and lobbying. It is widely believed, for example, that contributions – even if they do not “buy” votes – “buy” access for subsequent lobbying efforts. What “access” means to lobbyists is not exactly clear; but at a minimum it seems that contributions secure

“preferential treatment” – an advantage in making appointments and getting phone calls returned (p. 418).

In terms of how much money lobbyists organizations have at their disposal Jacobson, Stone, and Zeller (2002) state, “with 4 million-plus members and more than \$190 million in annual revenues, the National Rifle Association packs a strong political punch” (para. 25). In an environment where the political process is already tainted by news reports regarding scandals and inappropriate behaviors from politicians, it can be easily deduced that negativity towards politicians may be prevalent. Bonanno (2008) states, “A constituent can convey the same data as a lobbyist, but with an impact that only a voter has” (p. 72). To put this in perspective, the money that lobbyists have at their disposal, as related to the example of the NRA, presents an advantageous situation for them to press their respective agenda.

Lastly, is there a positive or negative impact perceived by Americans regarding lobbyists’ activities regarding gun laws? The answer to this question will not be based on fact, but rather on the collected data regarding perceptions deduced from the survey and current relevant research. The following from Bai and Rosenberg (1999) provides insight regarding how Americans perceive the gun lobby,

In the wake of the Columbine massacre, polls show that more than 80 percent of Americans back stricter laws. Just weeks ago, the Senate took advantage of the national mood to pass a tough law requiring safety locks on new handguns and a detailed background check on buyers at gun shows. But as they have so many times before, activists underestimated the ferocity and might of the NRA and its 2.5 million members. It may seem a liberal shibboleth, but last week’s clash proved once again that the NRA is a powerful force on Capitol Hill (para. 2).

If public mood was overwhelmingly in favor for more gun control, why didn't all of Congress concede to this sentiment and establish a law consistent with the majority view? A better question more in line with this research would be how did this impact voter perception of lobbyists' organizations?

In summary, the research provided for the reader will establish a baseline of knowledge regarding gun laws and how lobbyists may positively or negatively impact this type of legislation. The research on lobbyists' tactics will provide the reader with a better understanding of how lobbyists incorporate themselves into the legislative process. The survey will offer qualitative data for analysis and gain an understanding of how well individuals understand current gun laws and if they feel gun legislation is influenced by lobbyists.

Literature Review

The majority of the literature regarding lobbyists and their influence on gun laws is more prevalent regarding national legislation. As a result, most of these lobbyists' organizations have satellite offices across the nation promoting similar themes, tactics and strategies. Therefore, it is relatively safe to assume that reviewing the literature that involves national implications in regards to gun legislation can also be applied at the state level. Conceding that each state has different laws regarding gun ownership and restrictions; however the approach by lobbyists to mitigate legislation regarding their agenda is relatively the same.

In, *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*, authors Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Leech, and Kimball dissect how lobbyists analyze a policy and decide what tactics to implement, if any, to further their agenda. The literature takes a holistic approach toward studying a much broader range of issues that are lobbied in regards to the legislative process in Washington, D.C.; however, the literature is important to this research because it

provides a baseline of knowledge of all lobbyists that can easily be applied to those specifically involved with firearms. In the literature, the authors describe three constraints on choice that ultimately determine a lobbyist's strategic approach. These constraints are the power of the status quo; the degree of change sought, and issue salience (Baumgartner et al., 2009).

The status quo are policies already in place that must have a strong proposed policy alternative and be met with a strong opposing organized force advocating for the new policy. Lawmakers are reluctant to change status quo policies for many reasons. Baumgartner, et. al. (2009) states,

The status quo tends to remain the status quo, despite organized efforts to change it.

Because of this, we expected to see that the intent of a policy advocate – whether they are playing defense, attempting to protect the status quo, or offense, proposing a change in policy – would be the single most important determinant of their behavior. It will affect the types of arguments they use, the tactics they choose, their overall level of effort, and the success they can expect to enjoy (p. 115).

Ultimately, status quo policies could be deemed career killers for lawmakers who attempt to change them due in part to their popularity by the majority of constituents or the heavy influence from lobbyists that provide resources such as money or man hours during election cycles.

Lobbyists understand these pressures that lawmakers endure regarding the status quo and will effectively manage their tactics regarding time and resources when dealing with these types of potential policy changes. In regards to gun control legislation, status quo policies seem to have staying power. We have seen extreme tragedies occur such as the incident at Virginia Tech, but how do these massacres affect public opinion regarding gun control legislation? Fuller (n.d.) states, "A Pew Research Center study from 2012 showed that opinions about gun control versus

gun rights were unchanged by the previous three mass shootings in the United States” (para. 8).

The status quo seems to prevail following major tragedies which only validate the complexities involved with altering these standing laws.

The second constraint, degree of change sought, involves how to best change the policy in the most effective way to meet a specific agenda. For instance, in lieu of total policy change, lobbyists may attempt to break down an existing policy and make subtle changes that will meet desirable outcomes. The caveat to this approach is that lawmakers tend to be less likely to expend time and resources on a minor change that may not prove to be profitable in terms of political aspirations (Baumgartner, 2009).

The third and last constraint is issue salience which essentially involves how much attention a particular policy receives. The management of issue salience is important to lobbyists due to the influence it has on different views and interests regarding gun legislation. Issue salience is directly impacted and easy to gauge when catastrophic events occur, however at other times the magnitude of the salience are problematic to comprehend. This attention can come in the form of public oversight, media publicity, and lawmaker observations. Baumgartner, et. al. (2009) states,

When issues are especially salient to the public, an advocates actions are more likely to be observed and the issue is more likely to engage other advocates. When issues are less salient, existing scholarship suggests that advocates benefit from operating under the radar and out of the public eye (p. 120).

This constraint is of particular interest regarding gun laws due to the nature of recent public incidents and the attention they produce from the aforementioned interest groups. Empirical data

suggests, Americans attitudes following gun violence massacres calls for increased gun control measures through legislation. McKissick (2001) states,

Kollman builds off a crucial distinction he draws between a policy issue's popularity and its salience. What people think about some issue is likely to be relatively clear to policymakers, Kollman argues, but how much they are about it at any given time typically will be more uncertain and variable. Because salience, as a cousin to intensity, helps policymakers gauge the likelihood of eventual (electoral) political action, groups' information about a policy's salience is of value to policymakers (para. 2).

For instance, after the incident at Sandy Hook Elementary School, the public's attention was focused toward gun control efforts in the form of stricter legislation. Conversely, pro-firearm lobbyists were also steadily engaged to protect individual gun rights due to the increased public call for gun control measures sought through legislation. National incidents regarding gun violence thrusts gun legislation into the forefront of national debate and as a result it is easily deduced that gun law saliency is extremely high.

The re-occurring theme is that lawmakers generally tend to maintain the status quo regarding gun legislation despite public outcries for policy change. How does this affect American perception of gun lobbyists? Gun control potentially has the ability to unite people despite their political views, beliefs or differences. When mass shootings occur, this sentiment is exacerbated and desires for political action are more prevalent. Instead, gun control turns into a political tug of war between legislators and gun lobbyists. The political change sought by Americans and legislators are met with fierce opposition by a highly influential group of gun rights advocates and those who lobby on their behalf. As a result, any proposed changes to the status quo are met with debate. This clearly illustrates that Americans desire change but are met

with strong opposition by gun lobbyists. This strong opposition is normally in the form of money that gun rights organizations have at their disposal. OpenSecrets.org (2014) states,

If lawmakers are guilty of tiptoeing around gun control issues, it is because the NRA and other gun rights groups wield an enormous amount of influence in Washington. The source of that influence is money. Gun rights groups have given more than \$17 million in individual, PAC and soft money contributions to federal candidates and party committees since 1989. Nearly \$15 million, or 85 percent of the total, has gone to Republicans. The National Rifle Association is by far the gun rights lobby's biggest donor, having contributed more than \$14 million over the past 15 years. Gun control advocates, meanwhile, contributed far less money than their rivals – a total of nearly \$1.7 million since 1989, of which 94 percent went to Democrats. The leading contributor among gun control advocates is the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, formerly known as Handgun Control, which has given \$1.5 million over the past 15 years (para. 7).

Clearly if the overwhelming sentiment is to restructure gun laws, the agents that are advocating against such legislation can only be regarded in a negative light. Referring back to the salient constraint, Birnbaum (1999) states,

All of which helps explain why in 1999, the worse year in memory for mass shootings, the NRA tied for No. 2 in Fortune's Power 25 survey of clout in the capital. Its highest rank ever. It was rated No. 1 among Congressmen and their staffs, the people on the frontlines of lobbying (para. 2).

Lobbyists' organizations, such as the NRA, dedicate resources in the form of money and man-hours to advance their agenda among lawmakers. Goss (2006) states,

Gun owners' groups, notably the National Rifle Association and its states affiliates, provide an array of incentives to attract members and then turn those membership dues toward political action. America's political system, with its multiple layers and divided powers, favors committed and well organized groups such as the NRA, even if only small minorities of citizens embrace their views (para. 18).

The political action that Gross mentions often comes in the form of campaign contributions. Organizations such as the NRA, who contribute to and endorse these candidates, also have a platform to where they can reach a multitude of voters. OpenSecrets.org (2014) states,

The National Rifle Association has an additional advantage over all other groups in the debate. As a membership organization, the NRA can spend unlimited funds on communications to its 4 million members that identify pro-gun candidates. Those members also contribute millions of dollars in limited donations to the NRA's political action committee, which runs ads aimed at the general public that expressly advocate the election or defeat of a federal candidate. Since 1989, the NRA has spent more than \$22 million on communications cost and independent expenditures, with more than \$18 million spent in support of Republican candidates (para. 9).

In regards to the members that organizations such as the NRA possess, legislators view these individuals as potential voters. Understandably, the more members these groups have and how organized they are with their message resonates with legislators and these groups have an advantage to access law-makers. Legislators view lobbyists from these types of organizations as creditable due to the information, data, and political stability in terms of votes or campaign contributions they can provide.

Lobbyist organizations such as the NRA have a distinct advantage over gun control advocate organizations due to their monetary strength with contributions to lawmakers, their ability to effectively manage the salient issue, and the fact that policy makers are reluctant to go against status quo policy. It is easy to deduce that American perceptions regarding the gun lobby are received with negative connotations mainly due to gun lobbyists' influences on the lawmakers that are voted into Congress by the people.

In *The ideal lobbyist: Personal characteristics of effective lobbyists*, author Connor McGrath discusses the personal traits and attributes that lobbyists need or should possess in order to be successful and influence or persuade lawmakers toward their agenda. The text provides five qualities a lobbyist must have based on his research and interviews with 60 lobbyists who represent a wide variety of interest groups. These qualities are listening, observant, courtesy, relationship skills and honesty (McGrath, 2006).

Active listening skills are important in any profession and especially while lobbying. Often, those that take the time to listen have a better understanding of how better to articulate their view and sway the debate in their favor when they know what words and ideals will resonate with their audience. The major objective sought through active listening is to gain clear and concise understanding of the speaker's views and needs. When active listening is achieved, the listener will be able to convey their interests within the scope of the original speaker's dialogue. McGrath (2006) also adds the following from an interview with a lobbyist he conducted during his research regarding good listening skills,

The greater our political influence, the more I can develop one-on-one relationships, which you need to get things done here. It is all about who you know, and it is all about relationships with people. Part of being a good lobbyist is that you need to develop these

people skills. There are a lot of people here who don't have a personality, and they get nowhere: it is all about developing that skill, and being flexible, being open minded and being a good listener. That is a key in this business - sometimes I will be meeting someone for hours, and I just sit and take it all in, make some notes and not comment because you want to learn, you want to listen and pay attention, and then you can comment when necessary. Being a good listener is always a good skill to develop to be a good lobbyist (p. 70).

The next quality McGrath discusses is the ability to be observant and cognizant of your surroundings to get an understanding of the individuals lobbyists intend to press their agenda upon. In regards to observation, the speaker must pick up on universal body language that suggests their audience is losing or has lost interests in their message. If a presenter observes these gestures, then it would necessitate a change in the delivery of the message in such a way that will resonate with the majority of the audience. While these types of body languages are relatively easy to read and common, it still requires a presenter, or in the context of this paper a lobbyist, to be cognizant of the attitudes individuals project while trying to press talking points. McGrath (2006) presents the following from an interview,

There are a variety of directories which give you background information on every Member of Congress – their whole biography, what their state looks like, what their congressional district looks like, where they went to school, whether they are married and have kids. All of that is fine, but if you work for me and that is the only knowledge you have, then you have no value. I want to know anything else about a Member that is not in those directories. I teach my students and I encourage my staff to be observant: you go into a Member's office and look around it, you know there are these photos just of the

Member and the kids with no spouse, so maybe there has been a divorce, and that tells you something about the Member. The way they dress can tell you something. Look for what helps give you an edge (p. 71).

The next quality McGrath points out is courtesy. While this may seem like a logical discourse for any lobbyists to project, many times a lobbyist may be so consumed with their message this attribute might at times be lacking. For instance, the NRA's comments made by Wayne LaPierre, following the Sandy Hook Elementary massacre was met with wide displeasure from gun control advocates and even those who support gun rights. As captured by Lichtblau and Rich (2012), "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun," Wayne LaPierre, the N.R.A. vice president, said at a media event that was interrupted by protesters (para. 2). McGrath (2006) states,

There is often disagreement between consultancies and clients about what needs to be done. Sometimes these are disagreements about the substance of what needs to be done, but as often as that it would be disagreement about the tone of voice to be used. Many industries feel very aggrieved by the things that politicians are doing to them and so their instinct is to smash the door down and kick the guy in the teeth. You have to try to suggest to them that maybe that is not the most persuasive approach to adopt if you are trying to get this guy on your side. When you are talking to politicians or officials I think you need to be clear and you need to be courteous (p. 73).

In business the ability to build and maintain lasting relationships could mean the difference between success and failure. This also holds true for lobbyists as they attempt to influence lawmakers. Essentially, a great relationship for a lobbyist equates to increased access to law-makers. This increased access means more opportunity to engage legislators or their staff

regarding their interests and concerns. Consequently, strong lasting relationships are vital to lobbyists and must be a tactic that is at their disposal. “It is very important that people know the policy-makers. Most individuals working for powerful interest groups have at least a few contacts, controlling the gates of political power. Personal relationships make access and influence much more likely” (Kanol, 2014, p. 54). Clearly, it is imperative that lobbyists build and maintain strong relationships with legislators. Lobbyists thrive on giving and most importantly receiving information in order to influence the debate in their favor.

Lastly, McGrath (2006) discusses the import of honesty and how every lobby should strive to incorporate this trait into every political system. Additionally, policy makers should view lobbyists as trustworthy if any relationship is to be established. Ainsworth (1993) states, “Lobbyists attain credibility because legislators establish institutional structure that force the lobbyist types to separate. Lobbyists repeatedly state how important their reputations for honesty and forthrightness are and how valuable access is” (p. 53). Ultimately, honesty equates to providing legislators with unbiased objective data to convey the intended message. In any argument, there are at least two opposing views or opinions. The only way to produce information that is not biased is to also present dissenting viewpoints with relevant and truthful data. Lobbyists who are not candid with legislators run the risk of losing credibility with law-makers and their ability to successfully impart their agenda. Simply observed, lobbying effectively requires impeccable communication by passing on reliable information. In order to remain credible with law makers, lobbyists must present accurate and factual positions regarding their organization and the situation as a whole if there are any hopes to influence legislators.

History of Gun Lobbyists

Gun rights and gun control are heavily debated topics at all levels of government and communities across the nation. Pro-gun enthusiasts contend that the right to own and possess a firearm is protected under the United States Constitution. Conversely, gun control proponents are often moved when gun tragedies occur to create more legislation to restrict access to firearms. These interest groups are well represented by lobbying groups at the state and federal levels of government. This section of the paper will supply the reader with a timeline of when the gun lobby started; its purpose and an introduction to various gun lobbyists' organizations.

The history surrounding the creation of the United States involves the use of firearms. Most notably, America's separation from England which climaxed during the Revolutionary War saw the majority of individuals that fought were militia that provided their own weapons and ammunition toward the cause. Hunting during this period was the primary food source and means of survival which made owning a gun more common and a necessity. These early Americans fought to preserve their rights and repel tyranny. One of these rights was to protect an individual's right to keep and bear arms. Many who argue in favor of gun rights frequently cite the Second Amendment of the Bill of Rights. Konig (2009) states, "The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution begins, like the Constitution itself, with a preamble: "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" (p. 1296). The decision to possess and own firearms is arguably viewed by many Americans as a personal right and should not be influenced by politics. Events involving firearms in American history has necessitated the need to argue politically to protect this decision.

One of the first pieces of gun control legislation was when New York passed the Sullivan Act in 1911. State Senator Tim Sullivan authored this bill for numerous questionable intentions. The law required that an individual must have a police issued permit to possess a handgun and a felony to have a concealed gun on your person (Walsh, 2012). Sullivan used the August 9, 1910 failed assassination attempt of New York Mayor William Gaynor, who was shot in the neck by a dockworker named John Gallagher. This incident created a media frenzy trying to bring reason to an unreasonable act. The handgun and the public's access to weapons easily became the focal point of the problem (Platt, 2011). The Sullivan Act was passed with ease. Relative to this discussion is the lack of presence of a formalized gun lobbying effort. Platt (2011) states,

The Sullivan Law's advocates refused to cede rights talk to the other side. Against the protest of the nascent gun lobby, the law's advocates argued that the public's right to safety from muggers and stray bullets tramped the rights of gun makers, gun sellers, and gun owners (para. 10).

The Sullivan Law was the first significant gun control measure passed and due to the major restrictions it held against the individual right to possess and own guns would take the gun lobby from a nascent state to an organized political force.

The second piece of relevant legislation was at the federal level with the passage of the National Firearm Act (NFA) of 1934. The 1930s were notorious for organized mobster style criminal activities. The violent acts during this highly publicized period would form the public mood that things needed to change concerning firearms. This stance was also echoed at the national level in Congress. Higginbotham (2013) states, "Back then, mobsters and bootleggers received a fair amount of media scrutiny. Running liquor was a (sometimes) profitable business, and some of the parties involved armed themselves with revolvers, pistols, modified shotguns

and early machine guns” (para. 2). The NFA was designed to target these types of weapons that many viewed as highly destructive due to their ability to inflict mass casualties. Garret (2014) states,

The first major effort to eliminate private ownership of firearms came with the National Firearms Act of 1934. A direct response to the rise of gangster violence in general, and the Saint Valentine’s Day massacre in particular, the National Firearms Act sought to circumvent the Second Amendment by controlling firearms through a tax excise (\$200 for each gun sale) (para. 6).

Like the Sullivan Law, the NFA would give rise to the gun lobby. These two laws differ, in that the NFA was on the federal level generating national recognition. The attention garnered by the passing of the NFA would begin the transformation of the National Rifle Association (NRA) into the political organization it is today. According to The Free Dictionary (2014), “the NRA formed its legislative affairs division, a precursor to its powerful lobbying arm, in 1934 in belated response to the NFA” (para. 5). The NFA is a major contributor to the political climate that created the need for pro-gun interests groups to organize with the hopes of protecting or advancing their gun rights.

The next major legislation to discuss is the Gun Control Act (GCA) of 1968. Several national events encouraged Congress to pass meaningful gun control legislation. These events included the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and civil rights activists Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, this legislation sought to mitigate violence through the use of firearms and was considered to impose the most significant restrictions since the passing of the NFA (Eakins, 2004). Vizzard (2013) states, “At

no time before or since has Congress addressed gun control policy with as much breadth or depth” (para. 1). According to Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence (2012),

The GCA also enacted prohibitions on the importation of firearms “with no sporting purpose.” However, neither the GCA nor any other federal law regulates the domestic manufacture or sale of firearms which would not pass the federal criteria for determining whether a firearm has “a sporting purpose.” Among the other major provisions of the GCA were the establishment of minimum wages for firearms purchasers, the requirement that all firearms (domestic and imported) be affixed with a serial number, and the expansion of the categories of prohibited persons (para. 3).

The GCA was the first major legislation that the NRA lobbied against. The restrictions were to date, the most prevalent ever passed by Congress. The GCA created the controls on gun transfers by establishing and limiting these transactions to federally licensed dealers. These dealers must adhere to local and state laws and ordinances and obey restrictions on out of state gun sales. Additionally, the GCA set restrictions regarding individuals who could possess a gun. These individuals included drug users, convicted felons, illegal aliens, and people convicted of domestic assault or have been involuntarily committed as mental health consumers (Braga, Cook, and Moore, 2000).

Initially, the NRA supported the GCA fearing the backlash the organization could receive through perceived lack of compassion due to the President Kennedy assassination. However, this stance would quickly fade as the more conservative members within the NRA demanded a more partisan approach. Although in support of the bill, the NRA was able to water down some of the more key components of the legislation. According to Eakins (2004), “The NRA publication *The Rifleman* criticized the bill as a product of “irrational emotionalism,” and the

first four issues of *The Rifleman* in 1964 dedicated more than thirty columns to firearms legislation” (para. 2). Sorensen (2013) states,

Two opposing forces appeared: Senator Thomas J. Dodd from Connecticut versus the most powerful gun lobbying group, the National Rifle Association. The next five years of proposing gun control legislation landed in stalemate for the majority of the time period. As the public opinion swayed politicians into favoring Dodd’s bill, the National Rifle Association made amendments to the Dodd Bill. The bill’s passing was seen as a victory for gun control in response to accumulating political assassination, but the key secret was the National Rifle Association’s ability to amend and shortcut the original Dodd Bill into a less effective piece of gun control legislation (p. 2).

Unlike the passage of the NFA, the GCA legislation was heavily lobbied under the model that is currently practiced in politics today.

The pro-gun lobby’s main purpose is to provide a voice for like minded individuals pertaining to gun rights possession and ownership. In describing an interest organization Lowery (2007) states,

The politics of organized interest is, of course, a natural, even a core, topic of political science. Accordingly, the initial portion of this paper will necessarily discuss the long-standing debate between those who view organized interests as inevitably corrupting influences on the links between citizens and government within democratic systems and those who view organized interest as essential and healthy parts of that linkage (para. 2).

With the emergence of the pro-gun lobby, gun control groups also formed due to the strong presence that was observed by pro-gun lobbyists such as the NRA during the GCA legislative process. Easkins (2004) states,

The Johnson administration's proposal suffered a string of defeats over the next three years because of heavy pressure from the NRA, key congressional leaders who supported them, the American Legion, and gun importers, manufactures, and dealers. Adding to the administrations difficulties was the lack of an organized pro-gun control lobby to check the relentless onslaughts against the legislation by the NRA" (para. 3).

The political influence that lobbyists possess is exponential. As was the case for the GCA, the legislation was substantially changed due to lobbyists' influence despite strong public support for stricter gun control measures.

In addition to the gun lobby protecting individual gun rights or pressing for more gun control, pro-gun lobbyists also legislate on behalf of gun producers and manufactures. This relationship between pro-gun lobbyists and gun producers has often been met with contention. There is a perceived negative connotation that lobbyists who represent big corporations could not also lobby on behalf of everyday Americans. The NRA in 2005 heavily lobbied for legislation that would not hold gun producers as liable against gun violence (Hallman, 2013). According to Hallman (2013) this,

Has led to mounting questions from gun control advocates about the NRA's priorities. Is the nation's most potent gun lobby mainly looking out for its base constituency, the estimated 80 million Americans who own firearms? Or is it acting on behalf of those that make and sell those guns? (para. 4).

A reasonable person would support any type of legislation that produces less violence by the use of guns. The purpose of the NRA is called into question when they support such measures as this.

The timeline of when gun lobbyists groups were created closely align with major gun control legislation or significant national events tied to gun violence. Today, there are many lobbyists groups that take a pro-gun and gun control stance. This section of the paper will introduce some of these organizations and a brief history of how they came into existence.

The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence is one of the more notable gun control lobbyists' organizations. This nonprofit organization was formed in 1974 with its current headquarters located in Washington, D.C. (Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, 2014). Originally, this group started under the name Handgun Control, Inc (HCI) with Nelson T. Shields III as its founding chair. In 1980, Press Secretary John Brady was badly wounded in the head when John Hinkley attempted to assassinate President Ronald Reagan. As a result of Brady's injuries, he was permanently paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair. Soon after this incident, Sarah Brady, Secretary Brady's wife, began to advocate for stricter gun control laws and became the Chair of HCI (McClure, 2004). According to McClure (2004), the mission of the HCI as described by the NRA states that the "HCI was formed to lobby for legislative control and government regulations on the manufacture, importation, sale, transfer, and civilian possession of handguns. Their efforts have expanded to include attempts to limit the private ownership of semi-automatic firearms, specifically rifles" (para. 17). The most notable legislation sponsored by the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence was the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (Brady Bill) approved in 1993 by Congress. The Brady Bill worked in concert with the GCA and established a required background check to ensure only individuals that were not prohibited could purchase a gun. The required background checks would provide law officials with an easier way to check persons prior to the sale of unauthorized weapons (Laws.com, 2013).

Another gun control advocacy lobby, The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence (CSGV), was organized in 1974 with the mission to conduct effective research to mitigate gun violence through political engagement to effect policy change. The organization was originally known as the National Coalition to Ban Handguns (NCBH), however, changed its name to the CSGV in 1989. McGrath (2007) states,

We started out our life originally as the National Coalition to Ban Handguns-we wanted to eliminate them altogether-but that turned out to be neither a very politically- nor policy-wise position to take, so we changed the name to the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence. More recent research has shown that we can significantly reduce gun violence through a series of less drastic policy changes. We still say that we support banning handguns and assault weapons, but right now our major goals are licensing, registration and universal back-ground checks (p. 276).

The CSGV is a nonprofit group, organized into 47 national organizations consisting of religious groups, child welfare and social justice service organizations, and public health professionals, all with the mission to reduce or end gun violence. The range of different service organizations that make up CSGV, enables the organization to reach a diverse population from different social economic groups all with hopes to diminish violence through gun use (“Coalition to Stop Gun,” 2014). Goss (2004) states,

In the 1970s, four national gun control organizations came into existence. Two of them quickly established themselves as the leaders of the pack: the National Coalition to Ban Handguns (“NCBH”) and the National Council to Control Handguns (“NCCH”). Formed in 1974 as a consortium of women’s, civic, labor, and religious associations, NCBH

sought national legislation to prohibit the import, manufacture, sale, transfer, ownership, possession, and use of pistols among the general public (p. 691).

One of the more recent laws that the CSGV has advocated against is the Stand Your Ground Law which received notoriety when Trayvon Martin was killed in Florida. This law is currently in 20 states and allows a person to use lethal force for self-defense without a duty to make an attempt to flee the situation. In a response to this incident, the GCGV created an online ad regarding the Martin incident to push for legislation against this type of law (Terkel, 2013).

Gun Owners of America (GOA) is a pro-gun lobby organization, started in 1975 by then California State Senator H. L. Richardson. Richardson started the organization due to proposed legislation in California aimed at banning all handguns in the state. Richardson's involvement was influential; however, the bill was eventually defeated. Richardson, also a director for the NRA, continued service in both organizations (Garrett, 2014). Although smaller in total membership than the NRA, the GOA has made a name for itself within the pro-gun lobbying political arena with a proven track record of influencing lawmakers. By comparison, the GOA reported revenue less than two million dollars in 2011 and the NRA reported 220 million. In the same year, the GOA spent 1.3 million pressing Congress regarding gun laws and the NRA spent almost three million. The GOA reports 300,000 members on the roll that pays dues while the NRA has five million (Steinhauer, 2013). GOA is often perceived as the more conservative pro-gun lobbyists' organization, unwilling to bend on any legislation that could involve any form of gun control. In addition to lobbying efforts, the GOA also raises funds for pro-gun candidates through its political action committee, Gun Owners of America, Inc. Political Victory Fund. Regarding the GOA's ultra conservative stance, Steinhauer (2014) states,

Like many grass-roots groups, it is loud. Its members pepper Republican lawmakers with calls. In Republican primaries, the group supports candidates that hew to its message, and it rates floor votes with criteria far tougher than the N. R. A.'s (para. 11).

The National Rifle Association is considered one of the most popular and influential pro-gun lobbyists' organizations in Washington. Ironically, the NRA was not initially founded to influence gun advocacy legislation, but rather to teach and promote gun safety and marksmanship. Created and chartered in New York on November 17, 1871 by former Union officers, Colonel Williams C. Church and General George Wingate, the primary purpose for the organization was to teach and provide marksmanship skills which they felt were lacking. Union Civil War Veteran, General Ambrose Burnside would serve as the organization's first president (NRA History, 2014). So, how did an organization, founded to promote the sportsmanship of firearms turn so political? In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the organization began its migration into an organization aimed at influencing legislation that advocated gun control. The passage of the Gun Control Act of 1968 is perceived to be the main piece of legislation that caused the more radical members of the NRA to seek organizational change (Achenbach, Higham, and Horwitz, 2013). Achenbach, Higham, and Horwitz (2013) states,

In the second half of the 1970s, the NRA faced a crossroads. Would it remain an establishment institution, partnering with such mainstream entities as the Ford Foundation and focusing on shooting competitions? Or would it roll up its sleeves and fight hammer and tongs against the gun-control advocates (para. 17).

Ultimately, the NRAs fight was both within the organization and against gun control advocates. Gross (2004) states,

The NRA in 1974 created, and began aggressively raising money for, its Office of Legislative Affairs. By September 1975, it had raised nearly two million dollars. The NRA also registered its top officials as lobbyists. At the same time, advocates dissatisfied with what they saw as the NRA's insufficiently hard-line stance created Gun Owners of America, which pulled the NRA in the direction of protecting its right flank. Shortly thereafter, in 1977, hardliners within the NRA board of directors staged a coup d'état, known as the Cincinnati Revolt, at the organization's annual meeting. The hardliners, led by chief lobbyist Harlon Carter and his lieutenant Neal Knox, vowed that the NRA would never again compromise on gun control legislation (p. 711).

Today, the NRA is considered the most feared lobbying organization regarding pro-gun stances and legislation. With its strong financial presence with a budget above \$200 million and membership totaling 5 million members, the NRA is poised to remain a major force in reference to gun legislation at both the national and state levels (Griner, Krebs, and McDaniel, 2014).

Gun Lobby Tactics of Influence

Violence linked to guns in America is a perennial problem acknowledged by masses of individuals from every socio-economic condition, gender, race, and ethnicity. Daily, Americans are reminded of how gun violence is prevalent in our society. With the expansion of social media, daily news and happenings are at millions of peoples' disposal almost instantaneously. Following a mass massacre, such as the incident at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newton, Connecticut, a public uprising for additional securities in the form of gun control legislation are overwhelmingly sought. With this in mind, Americans wonder why this same attitude does not resonate with their political leaders. At the forefront leading the direction of debate regarding gun control laws or lack thereof are lobbyists.

As previously stated, gun control legislation is often sought, however, problematic to pass through Congress. One of the main tactics that lobbyists' organizations, such as the NRA, employ to mold the gun legislation debate can be articulated easily, money. In today's political environment, if a candidate or an incumbent cannot raise a significant amount of funds for their election, the chance of victory decreases enormously. Weinberg (2014) states,

Debates over campaign finance reform have been framed around dueling needs to prevent political corruption while protecting first amendment rights. Proponents argue that financing elections through private money leads to corruption, because politicians are beholden to their donors and not to their constituents. Contrarily, opponents argue that money equals speech. Any infringement on the right to spend money articulating a political preference is a direct violation of the first amendment. What has ensued is a very important debate about the point at which money stops being speech and starts becoming a form of power used to drown out the voice of others (para. 1).

The monetary donations that politicians receive from organizations such as the NRA or the GOA leave them entitled and maybe even powerless to go against the status quo for fear of reprisal. The stress and pressures in order to get re-elected are beyond description and words. According to Berlow (2013),

For Starters, the dollars and cents disparities are nothing short of staggering. The NRA and its allies in the firearms industries, along with the even more militant Gun Owners of America, have together poured nearly \$81 million into House, Senate and presidential races since the 2000 election cycle (para. 4).

With this amount of money pouring into election cycles from pro-gun lobbyists, it is easy to ascertain how the NRA or GOA is able to influence the gun control legislation debate in their favor. Che and Gale (1998) state,

There are many reasons why increased campaign spending might be socially harmful. First, increased spending means increased fund-raising, which may keep politicians from their legislative duties. Second, a lobbyist who makes a large campaign contribution may have undue influence on electoral outcomes, on the shaping of legislation, or on the outcome of regulatory proceedings. That is, the socially preferred candidate or legislation may not prevail (p. 643).

This may help to explain why popular gun control legislation is difficult to pass into law. The campaign expenditures that lobbyists groups spend cannot be matched by the ordinary voting constituent. Wright (1990) states,

Most organizations that sponsor political action committees (PACs) also maintain active lobbying operations; as a result, campaign contributions and lobbying often occur together. Sabato (1984, 124), in his survey of multicandidate political committees, found that 68% of the corporations, unions, and associations with PACs also have lobbying offices or representatives in Washington (p. 418).

In terms of how these monetary contributions influence legislators, Wright (1990) provides, The sheer magnitude of PAC expenditures, however, and the visibility and public concern about PAC money suggest that the importance of campaign contributions in the legislative process should not be dismissed quickly. Contributions may not influence voting directly, but they may affect lobbying activities. And lobbying activities, at the very least, help to define and to shape legislative agendas and debates (p. 418).

Gun rights groups such as the GOA and NRA significantly outspend gun control lobbyist organizations. Knowles (2013) states, “Campaign contributions given to 113th Congress from pro-gun interests far outweigh contributions from anti-gun interest” (para. 5). As earlier suggested, if contributions equate to more access to legislators to formulate the political debate, it stands to reason that pro-gun lobbyists have a distinct advantage. Knowles (2013) states,

An analysis of data from the Federal Election Commission reveals that the National Rifle Association and its political action committee spent a whopping \$15 million to try and make sure Obama would not be re-elected in 2012, the most the group spent either for, or against, any single candidate (para. 3).

According to Lee (2012) the divide between what pro-gun lobbyists organizations and gun control advocates spend is not comparable. In 2012, gun rights groups spent \$3.13 million towards federal campaign contributions while gun control groups spent a total of \$4,036. In terms of independent expenditures or advertisements in 2012, the NRA spent \$18.2 million while the most robust gun control organization, the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, spent zero dollars. In regards to 2012 lobbying, gun rights advocates spent \$3.8 million and gun control groups spent \$180,000 (Lee, 2012).

The most important part of a lobbyist’s job is being able to formulate an opinion based on a specific view point and communicate those opinions and interest to those with the power to effect change. The method to which this communication with legislators occurs are commonly referred to as direct and grassroots lobbying. IRS.gov (2014) defines direct and grassroots lobbying,

Direct lobbying refers to attempts to influence a legislative body through communication with a member or employee of a legislative body, or with a government official who

participates in formulating legislation. Grass roots lobbying refers to attempts to influence legislation by attempting to affect the opinion of the public with respect to the legislation and encouraging the audience to take action with respect to the legislation. In either case, the communications must refer to and reflect a view on the legislation (para. 1).

Based on this definition, it is easy to theorize that both tactics if properly implored could be beneficial. Hojnacki and Kimball (1999) states, “Because grassroots and direct lobbying strategies are the means by which different types of information are conveyed, groups may use the two sets of activities in a complementary manner” (p. 1002). For example, massive protests which involve marches, sit ins, or the more recently popular, die ins are effective because of the overwhelming response and support people give to a particular political injustice and the amount of awareness these types of actions demand from policy makers who can affect change.

According to Hojnacki and Kimball (1999), “Groups eschew grassroots lobbying on issues that engender consensus (e.g., distribution issues) because grassroots campaigns can be unpredictable, bringing greater attention to an issue and expanding the scope of conflict” (p. 1003). The same can be said in regards to using grassroots lobbying, where constituents who have an overwhelming interest in a pro-gun rights bombard their Congressional leaders with letters, phone calls, and emails to convey these interests. Walker (2009) states,

Professional grassroots campaigns, regardless of their institutional sponsors, know that powerful organizations need political legitimacy. Organizations have long relied on “inside” strategies, such as hiring paid lobbyists and making campaign contributions, but none of these strategies carry the weight of the public’s voice to the extent that “outside” campaigns do. To win legislative battles, these organizations benefit by “expanding the

scope of conflict” to include individual citizens, especially when legislators are “on the fence” on a given issue (p. 85-86).

Hojnacki and Kimball (1999) adds the following regarding grass roots lobbying,

Organizations use direct contacts with legislators or their staffs to convey specialized information about policy proposals (e.g., how a bill might be amended to address a group’s concerns). In contrast, grassroots campaigns which are essentially miniexperiments in political mobilization reveal important information to legislators about how constituents might react to their policy stands on Election Day (p. 1002).

To add validity to this type of lobbying strategy, Krauskopf (1979) adds, “Grassroots lobbying has become a powerful means for business, labor, and other interest groups to make their demands known to Congress” (p. 313).

Direct lobbying on the other hand, involves a more intimate relationship between a policy maker and lobbyists. Victor (2007) states,

Direct lobbying, sometimes called insider lobbying, is defined as “... close consultation with political and administrative leaders, relying mainly on financial resources, substantive expertise, and concentration within certain congressional constituencies as a basis for influence”. Direct lobbying is therefore made up of one-on-one contact and the provision of information to try to influence legislators (p. 3).

The NRA for example is heavily vested in direct lobbying efforts. Eggen (2010) states, “ With more than 4 million dues-paying members, the NRA has reported spending about \$2.5 million on direct lobbying through its Institute for Legislative Action since the beginning of last year (para. 7). While direct lobbying is a tactic used by the NRA, they also use grass roots lobbying as

well. The NRA has a substantial membership base that they can mobilize to add depth and perspective to their debate and agenda. Blumenthal and Stein (2012) states,

The Huffington Post interviewed 10 current and former aides on Capitol Hill and within the Obama administration to gather a fuller sense of how the NRA has become the political force it is today. Their responses were consistent. Because the group is flexible with its endorsements, they said, members of both parties routinely vey for its approval (a group that endorsed only Republicans would be written off as a lost cause by Democrats). More importantly, they said, the group's engaged, dues-paying members can be activated on short notice. Several staffers noted how office phone systems would be overwhelmed with calls and complaints. Usually, all the NRA had to do was to remind a lawmaker of its position and the chips fell into place (para. 15).

The power that the NRA has can be considered unnerving. The direct and grass roots lobbying the NRA uses to promote gun rights is a take it or leave it stance. The clout and level of influence this organization has goes beyond measure. As an example of the NRA's political might, consider the story of Tennessee House Republican Caucus Chairwoman Debra Maggart. According to Highham and Horwitz (2013) Maggart, at one point, was well regarded in the NRA and received an "A" rating from the organization due to her voting record in the Tennessee House. She was also a lifetime member. Maggart's issues with the NRA began when she sacked a bill that was favored by the organization that would have allowed Tennessee citizens to carry guns in their cars regardless of where they went. The NRA, to Maggart's surprise, began advertisement against her within her district which featured her face along side of President Obama. In turn, during the next election, the NRA supported a new and successful Republican candidate during the primary election. Highham and Horwitz (2013) states,

By summer's end, the woman who had been one of Tennessee's most powerful Republicans and ardent supporters of gun rights was done in by hardball tactics. "As a pro-Second Amendment person and life member of the NRA, I was just shocked they did this to me," Maggart said in an interview. "They did this to send a message: 'If you don't do what we want, we will annihilate you'" (para. 4).

The power that lobbyists' organizations possess and the tactics used by the NRA can establish a less than desired perspective of influence on politics for the American voter. Through the use of direct and grass roots lobbying the ability to promote the gun rights message and to influence the debate in reference to gun laws are evident.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this paper will search for an understanding in relation to the types of gun laws lobbyists' support and the eventual voting outcomes of the legislation in relation to constituent's views in an effort to provide a basic premise of how successful or unsuccessful lobbyists are at influencing lawmaker's opinions. This approach hopes to yield a finding, whether conclusively or objectively, that lobbyists' actions are primarily viewed as negative among voting constituents. The vast majority of the relevant research suggests that lobbyists integrate themselves into every piece of major gun legislation at the state and federal levels. The literature lacks findings regarding the publics' impressions toward government when lobbyists are heavily involved with the legislative process. This paper will attempt to bridge this gap in the current literature. To begin, a review of bills introduced during recent years at the state level in Virginia and at the Federal level will be analyzed. By reviewing current voting trends and public opinion regarding the legislation, the intent is to show how lobbyists influence lawmakers which could contribute to negative connotations from voting constituents.

As previously stated in the literature review, the issue of saliency is instrumental regarding how much time and resources lobbyists expend pertaining to a particular bill. Nathanson (1999) explores New York State's Sullivan Law, which required citizens to have a permit in order to possess a firearm. This law was passed in 1911 with extensive public attention as a result of an assassination attempt on the mayor. According to Nathanson (1999), this was "the first recorded instance of NRA lobbying against gun control was in opposition to the Sullivan Law" (p. 429). The Sullivan Law is an excellent example of how pro-gun lobbyists were unsuccessful advancing their agenda; however, I find this as the precursor to how lobbyists' organizations are involved with gun laws and the beginning of how their actions affect voters' views regarding government.

In Virginia, the requirement of whether or not gun dealers should be required to conduct a background check before gun show purchases was heavily debated. The Virginia Tech massacre sheds significant light regarding this issue. The shooter during this incident was a student at the university with previous significant diagnosed mental health issues. Siebel (2008) found that the shooter was able to purchase the handguns without a background check. However, even if his background was checked, his mental condition was never registered in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) and he would have been allowed to purchase the guns anyway. The take away from the Virginia Tech tragedy, according to Siebel (2008) "is for society to do a better job of checking gun buyers' backgrounds before every gun is sold" (p. 320). This incident was at the forefront of media attention in Virginia and the nation and easily met or exceeded the saliency constraint. Overwhelming support for better gun control was advocated by the majority of voting constituents. The rational or reasonable response would be to implement controls in the form of laws that would reduce the likelihood of an event like

this ever occurring again. According to Brown (2013), “American voters say 48-38 percent that the government could use the information from universal background checks to confiscate legally-owned guns, but voters still support universal gun background checks 91-8 percent, including 88-11 percent among voters in households with guns” (p. 1). This poll suggests that even though voters feel that more laws could infringe on their liberties to own and possess a gun, voters nonetheless realize that these types of controls may be needed in order to quell gun violence by individuals whose background suggests they should not be able to purchase a gun. Disregarding the emotional toll the Virginia Tech massacre created at the campus, the pro-gun lobby wasted no time promoting their agenda. Siebel (2008) states, “instead of accepting the straightforward solution of universal, thorough, background checks, the gun lobby clamors for legislation that would prohibit colleges and universities from maintaining rules or regulations that bar students from carrying handguns on campus” (p. 320). As we can see, this incident that consumed Virginia’s and the nation’s attention would be yet another instance for lobbyists to debate and influence our lawmakers. In Virginia, during the 2009 General Assembly session, Senate Bill 1257 (SB1257) was introduced by Senator Henry Marsh, a Democrat from Richmond, and Senator Janet Howell, also a Democrat representing Reston. The bill would require criminal records to be checked at gun shows before a vendor could make a sale (RichmondSunlight, 2014). Conceding this view as debatable, a law such as this bill could have prevented the incident that occurred on the campus of Virginia Tech. A poll conducted statewide found that ninety-two percent of Virginians substantially supported legislation aimed at requiring background checks before a firearm is purchased (Polls Show How Virginians Feel About Gun Control, 2013). It is more than reasonable to assume that both republican and democrat constituents were in support of this legislation based on a ninety-two percent approval rating.

According to Brown (2013), “In every Quinnipiac University poll since the Newtown massacre, nationally and in six states, we find overwhelming support, including among gun owners, for universal background checks” (p. 1). Despite profound support from constituents, SB1257 was ultimately struck down in the Senate. According to the Virginia Public Access Project (2014), the NRA Political Victory Fund reported lobbying against this bill. Grassroots tactics used by the NRA proved to be effective in the determination of the final vote. According to NRA-ILA (2009) Chris Cox, NRA chief lobbyist stated, “Because of the grassroots efforts of NRA members in Virginia and the steadfast support by a bi-partisan majority of state senators, gun owners are victors today” (para. 5). Conclusively, voters overwhelmingly supported background checks in order to purchase a gun; however, SB1257 did not become law with the NRA strongly opposing this bill.

Methodology

In our democracy, voters elect an individual, based on their geographical location, to represent them at the state and federal levels of government. Americans cast their votes for candidates that most resemble their own opinions and political views, with the understanding that if elected, these individuals will legislate for laws they feel are important to them. This political process was created during a time when the Internet did not exist and multi-billion dollar corporations did not stand to lose or gain millions based on whether or not a certain bill is passed. In today’s politics, the need for candidates and incumbents to raise substantial funds could mean the difference with getting elected. For these reasons and many more, politicians are under immense pressures to cater to certain interest groups to keep or advance their political careers. Additionally, this discourse breeds the potential to create a divide between lawmakers and their constituents. In this paper, lobbyists who overwhelmingly represent these interest

groups will be studied with the intent to gauge or measure how they influence lawmaker's decisions and the impressions felt by the American voter in relation to gun legislation. The most prevalent problem is finding current research that attempts to measure voter impressions of government when laws are affected by lobbyists who advance their agenda on lawmakers. Many polls are available to show how voters feel regarding a specific gun law or bill but the correlation between voters and how they feel about their elected official is lacking when lobbyists are involved with the legislative process. The methods used to measure these impressions will not provide a conclusive answer; however, it will provide a data set to make educated assumptions based on a small sample set.

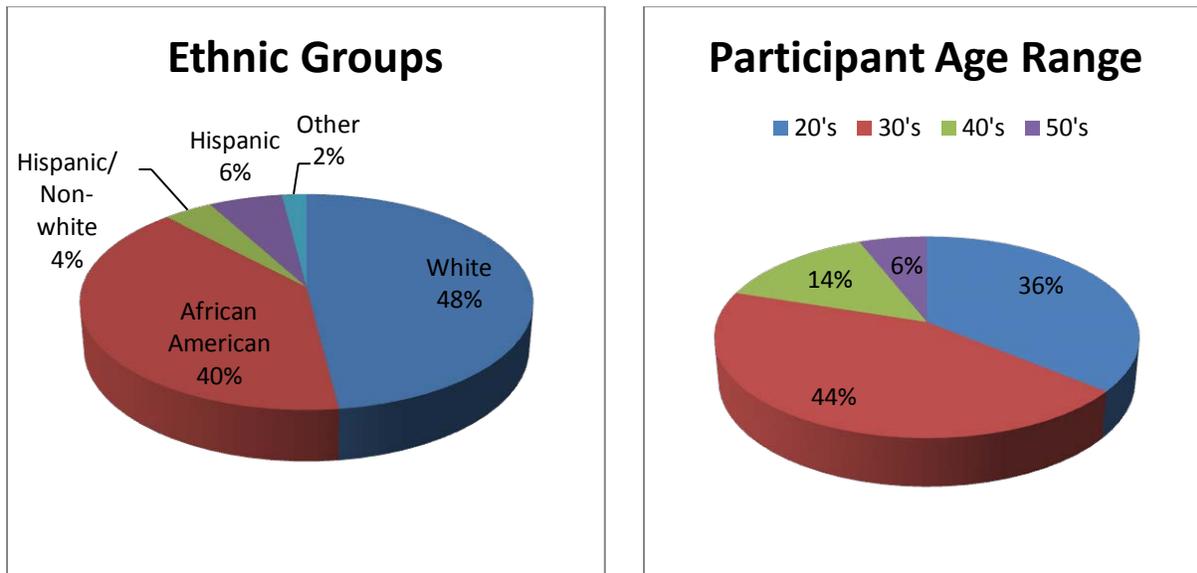
In order to produce a sampling set to procure relevant data a survey (Appendix 1) will be used. In addition to providing data to make assumptions for discussion, the information from the survey will be analyzed against current research regarding gun laws to establish trends. The survey is a mix of questions with an aim to find out if voters are aware of current gun laws, their level of understanding regarding how lobbyists interact with lawmakers, if they feel like lobbyists are successful at influencing how their legislators vote on gun bills, and if they feel like lobbyists' presence during the legislative process is positive or negative. The survey will be presented to willing participants with an understanding that their responses will be confidential. If they prefer to remain anonymous, a self-addressed envelope will be presented to the participant so they may mail their responses. A total of 50 completed surveys will be sought to include with the research. A diverse participant pool ranging in ethnicity, age, and gender will produce more reliable data to make educated assumptions. Once the data is collected a thorough analysis will be conducted in an attempt to find trends and make conclusions regarding voter's attitudes towards government. The data will be presented mainly in narrative form, but will also

include graphs and charts. The limitation of the survey is that it will only yield a relatively small sampling for analysis. In order to alleviate this limitation, answers provided during the survey were analyzed under the assumption that individuals with similar political ideology will have similar opinions and beliefs. Flanders (2007) states, “A political party is a group of voters organized to support certain public policies. The aim of a political party is to elect officials who will try to carry out the party’s policies” (para. 1). The answers on the survey can then be applied to a broader sampling of the United States population based on political party lines. This is difficult to surmise operationally and is not scientific in nature; however, this approach will provide the opportunity for a rational discussion on the subject matter and will offer qualitative data to analyze how voters feel when lobbyists are involved with government.

Lastly, by researching and analyzing the types of gun legislation lobbyists’ support and the eventual voting outcomes of those bills in relation to constituent’s views this paper will provide a basic premise of how successful or unsuccessful lobbyists are at swaying lawmaker’s opinions. Research of recent bills proposed will be analyzed to show public opinion regarding the legislation in relation to what position lobbyists took and the political voting outcome. This approach will provide essential discussion to ascertain and theorize how voters feel about government with influences from lobbyists.

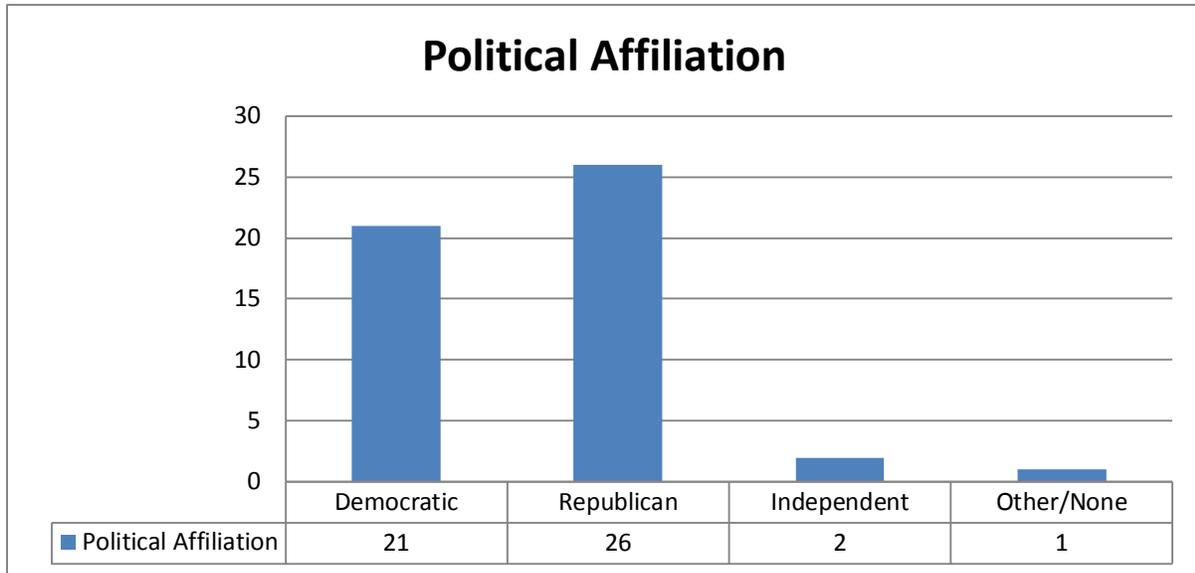
Results

In order to gain an understanding of how voters perceived how lobbyists influenced their elected officials regarding gun legislation, a survey was conducted (Appendix 1). A total of fifty individuals from a wide range of ethnic, social economic, age, and political backgrounds participated in the survey. The ethnic and age breakdown are depicted below in the following two pie charts.



Of the fifty participants, twenty-four (48%) identified themselves as Caucasian, twenty (40%) as African American, two (4%) as Hispanic of non-white decent, three (6%) Hispanic and one (2%) as other. The age range was predominantly individuals who stated they were in their thirties (44%). Participants in their twenties (36%) made up the second highest age range, while 14% and 6% stated they were in their forties and fifties. Participants were also asked to provide their political party affiliation. Of the fifty surveys completed, twenty-six (52%) identified themselves as Republican, twenty-one (42%) Democrat, two (4%) Independent and one (2%) for no party affiliation. The rationale for this question was to determine how voters from different political parties viewed legislators regarding their interactions with lobbyists and whether or not these

interactions help or hurt the legislative process. When asked if lobbyists activities help the legislative process regarding gun laws, twenty-five (96%) Republicans respondents stated yes. Nine (42%) Democrats stated yes in reference to the same question and the two Independent and one non-political party member stated no. Collectively, 68% of the survey participants agreed that lobbyists help the legislative process regarding gun laws.



Respondents were also asked if they owned a gun. This question was asked to determine if there is a correlation between gun ownership and political party. The Republican Party is perceived to be more conservative and more sympathetic toward gun ownership rights and pro-gun lobbyists such as the NRA or GOA. Of the twenty-six respondents that self identified as a member of the Republican Party, twenty-four (92%) also stated that they owned some type of gun. Nine (42%) of the twenty-one individuals that stated they were members of the Democratic Party own a gun. None of the Independents or non-political party participants admitted to owning a gun. When analyzing the numbers, there appears to be a direct connection between gun ownership by political party and how these political party members view lobbyists on how they help or hurt the legislative process. Members of the Republican Party own guns at a higher rate (92%) per the

survey while also agreeing (96%) that lobbyists help the legislative process. Democrats however, own guns at a lower rate (42%) and believe that lobbyists are not as helpful (42%) with legislation. In addition to these findings, the collected data also suggests that individuals that affiliate with the Republican Party think that lobbyists are more prone to influence law-makers to vote for more lenient laws. When asked during the survey, to what extent do you feel lobbyists are successful at persuading politicians to vote for lenient gun laws, forty out of fifty (80%) participants answered very successful. More interesting to note, is twenty-six (52%), which included all of the Republican participants, of the forty who answered very successful were Republican and the other fourteen (28%) were Democrats. A similar question was posed, asking participants to what extent do you feel lobbyists are successful at persuading politicians to vote against lenient gun laws. Forty-two of fifty (84%) participants answered very successful. Again, all twenty-six Republican (52%) respondents answered very successful. The remaining sixteen (32%) were Democratic Party members. Participants were then asked if they felt like lobbyists' activities and interactions with legislators regarding pro-gun laws influenced how lawmakers vote on gun legislation. Overall, forty-four (88%) answered yes with six (12%) answering no. Of the forty-four individuals who answered yes, twenty-six were Republican and the other affirmative answers were Democrats. In a Pew Research Center poll conducted in May 2013 regarding gun policy as a voting issue, Drake (2014) states,

While the NRA has played a highly visible role in the congressional debate over gun policy, public views of its influence have changed only modestly since December. Currently, about four-in-ten (39%) say it has too much influence over gun control laws, while 18% say it has too little influence and 35% say the organization has the right amount of influence. Fully 77% of liberal Democrats say the NRA has too much

influence over gun control laws, up 18 points since December and the highest percentage of any partisan group.

Wide Ideological Divide in Views of NRA's Influence

<i>NRA's influence over gun control laws...</i>	Too much	Too little	Right amount	DK
	%	%	%	%
Total	39	18	35	9=100
Men	34	19	41	6=100
Women	44	17	29	11=100
White	37	16	41	7=100
Black	52	25	19	5=100
Hispanic	44	18	20	18=100
Conserv Republican	15	19	58	8=100
Mod/Lib Republican	29	17	47	6=100
Independent	35	19	38	8=100
Conserv/Mod Dem	52	20	20	8=100
Liberal Democrat	77	11	10	2=100
Gun household	29	18	46	7=100
Gun owner	28	20	47	4=100
No gun in household	50	17	24	9=100
<i>More important to ...</i>				
Protect gun rights	17	21	54	8=100
Control ownership	61	15	16	8=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 1-5, 2013. Q50. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. Whites and Blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

By contrast, conservative Republicans are the only partisan group in which a majority (58%) says the NRA has the right amount of influence over gun laws (para. 31).

An important part of the survey in relation to the research was to identify how many respondents were gun owners and if there was any correlation between gun ownership, political affiliation and perceptions. By accessing this value, a focus of the research was to establish whether more conservative voters or Republican's were more likely to view gun lobbyists more favorably. The data certainly suggests that the more conservative Republican Party perceived lobbyists' efforts favorably mainly due to the fact that they are more likely to own a firearm and consequently more interested in lenient gun laws.

According to Drake (2014), in the same Pew Research Center poll conducted in May 2013 regarding gun policy as a voting issue,

Nearly half of conservative Republicans (47%) say they would not vote for a candidate who agreed with them on most issues, but disagreed with them on gun policy. Smaller percentages across other partisan and ideological groups, including 37% of liberal Democrats, say they would not support candidates who did not share their views on gun policy, even if they agreed with them on most other issues.

Conservative Republicans More Likely to Vote on Gun Policy

Vote for a candidate you disagree with on gun policy but agree with on most other issues?

	Would vote for	Would not	Other/DK
	%	%	%
Total	54	36	10=100
Conservative Republican	42	47	10=100
Mod/Lib Republican	58	34	8=100
Independent	56	35	10=100
Cons/Mod Democrat	64	31	5=100
Liberal Democrat	56	37	8=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 1-5, 2013. Q42.
Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.
Based on those who prioritize gun rights or controlling gun ownership (N=1,457).

People who own guns (46%) are more likely than those in households with no guns (33%) to view gun policy as an important voting issue. And among the vast majority of gun owners who support gun rights, 52% say they would not vote for a candidate with whom they disagreed on gun policy even if they agreed with them on most other issues. Among the much smaller share of gun owners who favor gun control, just 26% view gun policy as an important voting issue (para 28).

The poll conducted by the Pew Research Center also suggests that if you own a gun and hold conservative views the individual is more likely to support a candidate who shares their same point of view or willing to make votes against gun control legislation. Gun owners are also more willing to promote and contribute monetarily to groups and organizations that support anti-gun

control laws. As previously stated, 80% or forty out of fifty survey participants stated that lobbyists are successful at persuading politicians to vote for lenient gun laws. From this data it is easy to conclude that these individuals would be more willing to back and support lobbying firms such as the NRA or GOA. In the same poll conducted by the Pew Research Center, political activism was explored among these interests groups. According to Drake (2014),

There is a substantial gap between those who prioritize gun rights and gun control when it comes to political involvement. Nowhere is the gap larger than in making donations to activist organizations.

How Gun Rights Supporters and Gun Control Supporters Compare in Political Activism

	January 2013			May 2013					
	Have <u>ever</u> done the following			Have <u>ever</u> done the following			Have done in the <u>past six months</u>		
	Gun rights %	Gun control %	Diff	Gun rights %	Gun control %	Diff	Gun rights %	Gun control %	Diff
Contributed money to an organization that takes a position on gun policy	23	5	+18	25	6	+19	12	3	+9
Contacted a public official to express opinion on gun policy	15	8	+7	16	11	+5	11	9	+2
Expressed opinion on gun policy on a social network like Facebook or Twitter	19	15	+4	22	14	+8	19	12	+7
Signed a petition on gun policy	12	10	+2	18	12	+6	10	8	+2
NET: One or more activity	42	25	+17	45	26	+19	31	19	+12

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 1-5, 2013. Q47.

The current survey finds that a quarter (25%) of those who prioritize gun rights say they have, at some point, contributed money to an organization that takes a position on the issue, and about half of those (12% overall) have contributed money within the past six months. By comparison, just 6% of those who prioritize gun control have ever donated to a group, and only 3% have done so in the past six months (para. 25).

This would help to explain why the pro-gun lobby is able to raise and solicit funds at a higher rate than their gun control counterparts. As mentioned earlier, the ability to use money as a lobbying tactic to influence lawmakers and mold the political debate is of particular import.

Discussion

The gun lobby as an institution is thoroughly embedded within our political system and will continue to remain so in order to foster the political debate in reference to gun laws. The history regarding gun control legislation has helped to cultivate the need or perceived need for the gun lobby. With the level of engagement that lobbyists have with legislators in relation to gun law policy, this research sought to measure public perceptions regarding this involvement. With recent and past events that produced mass casualties through gun violence, the most prudent and responsible action would be to legislate controls on how guns are sold and when they are sold, and how one should possess them. The major line in the sand regarding gun control legislation presently is implementing the use of background checks in an attempt to mitigate who may purchase a firearm. Regardless, taking into account these countless tragedies that have occurred around the country, this piece of legislation, aimed at controlling the convenience at which firearms could possibly get into the hands of persons not suitable to possess them remains at a standstill. Pew Research (2013) states,

Following the Senate's rejection of gun legislation last month, the public continues to overwhelmingly favor making private gun sales and sales at gun shows subject to background checks. Nearly three-quarters of Americans (73%) say that if the Senate bill is reintroduced, Congress should pass it (para. 1).

Again, background checks continue to remain elusive despite overwhelming public support by both gun rights and gun control advocates. According to Pew Research (2013),

Gun control supporters can point to broad and consistent public support for expanded background checks. Fully 81% favor making private gun sales and sales at gun shows subject to background checks, little changed since January (85%). The proposal draws

nearly equal levels of support from Democrats (83%), Republicans (81%) and independents (80%) (para. 4).

The NRA has lobbied against this legislation. This is an excellent example of how much political clout the NRA has within our political system. Even with strong support from the constituents that these legislators serve, they are still unwilling to pass this bill. Perhaps, these legislators are apprehensive due to the influence of the NRA and the political fallout that would most certainly occur. Ultimately, the right to bear and keep arms, as the Constitution calls for, should not be a contributing factor to the gun rights legislation debate, but rather, how to ensure this right and create sensible laws that would mitigate or keep firearms out of the hands of non-responsible individuals.

There are several factors that allow for gun lobbyists to influence legislators. These tactics were previously discussed as money, direct and grassroots lobbying, and the ability to effectively communicate the interest group's message. Additional tactics include constraints on the degree of change sought, issue salience, and the status quo and how well lobbyists manage gun law proposals or changes to current legislation. What was found during the research is that the pro-gun lobby has mastered all of these influence tactics, while the gun control lobby is sorely lacking.

In regards to the status quo, gun rights advocates rally behind the language of the Second Amendment, which according to Kates (1983) states, "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" (p. 3). While there are many status quo gun laws in existence, the Second Amendment provides gun lobbyists with legislation that many lawmakers are reluctant to change. Judicially, the law has been challenged; however, the main context that an individual

has the right to possess a firearm has remained unaltered. The many debates we see today involve how an individual can possess a firearm. According to Miller (2009),

In *District of Columbia v. Heller*, the Supreme Court held that the Second Amendment guarantees an individual right to keep and bear arms for personal protection. But the Court offered legislatures and lower courts little guidance as to the scope of that right. The Court cautioned that the Second Amendment right is not boundless, but did not specify whether a person may now freely carry a gun into a park, a sports stadium, or a children's petting zoo. Such issues were left for future evaluation (p. 1279-1280).

The pro-gun lobby management of the status quo and its ability to effectively incorporate these kinds of laws into their political agenda and debates allows for effective influence over legislators.

In terms of monies raised as an interest group, gun rights activists dwarf gun control advocates considerably. In business as well as life, the term cash is king is prevalent and in the lobbying sector just as important. For instance, the NRA's ability to raise money through dues paying members and donations give their organization solid footing within Congress and a voice that every politician must listen to. The example of the Tennessee House Republican Caucus Chairwoman serves as notice that even a strong supporter of gun rights can become a political target if not totally in line with the NRA's message and pass or sack legislation accordingly. Also as an example, consider the unwillingness from Republican legislators and despite the extensive public support for the bill requiring background checks prior to firearm purchase continually cannot be passed into law. It is safe to assume that these legislators are reluctant because of the influence from the NRA and other pro-gun lobbyists' organizations. This reluctance can be contributed to funding for elections from pro-gun lobbyists organizations and

fear of political reprisal. The ability to raise a surplus of money also contributes to the pro-gun lobby's ability to use direct and grassroots lobbying effectively. With sources citing anywhere from four to five million members, the NRA could easily incite a massive movement by reaching out to legislators regarding any particular piece of gun legislation at the state or federal level. As previously observed, pro-gun rights enthusiasts are more passionate regarding their cause and interests, which makes a grassroots campaign more likely to succeed and be effective at raising the expectations for legislators to consider their views and ideology. Conversely, the gun control lobby has backing but is lacking the dedicated membership that most pro-gun lobbies enjoy. Past national tragedies that spark national outrage and desires for more gun control, has and will continue to heighten the issue salience for more gun control legislation. When this occurs, we see that pro-gun lobbyists dig in and hammer their message publically and with law-makers, while gun control enthusiast's motivation often subsides with the passing of time between horrific events and potential gun control legislation, such as background checks, is stalled during the legislative process. This motivation is defined as monetary donations as well as pressing legislators for more gun control laws through the use of grassroots tactics. Again, the pro-gun lobby has the unequivocal advantage over gun control lobbyists.

The ability for the pro-gun lobby to communicate their interests significantly allows for these types of lobbying entities to influence law-makers from casting votes that are considered pro-gun control. Pro-gun lobbies, such as the NRA, are able to reach the populace more effectively through multiple sources of media. Much of this success is again related to the mass quantities of money they are able to keep on hand. For instance, the NRA's ability to contribute money toward political campaigns using their PAC, allows them to promote their message using commercials, billboards, and social media to name a few. According to OpenSecrets.org (2014),

The dominance of gun rights groups when it comes to lobbying Congress and other federal agencies are even greater than it is in the realm of campaign finance. From 1998 through 2012, the gun rights lobby spent \$75 million making its case in Washington; in 2012 alone, it spent \$5.6 million. The NRA accounted for more than half of the 2012 number, or 2.9 million, but over the years other groups – such as Gun Owners of America and the National Shooting Sports Foundation – have also made significant lobbying expenditures. And gun control groups? They spent just \$240,000 lobbying in 2012 (para. 8).

The most significant finding from the research is that, the pro-gun lobby is more organized with a larger following who are dedicated to their cause and interests. It is not that individuals who support pro-rights are more passionate, it is simply they are more dedicated and more engaged in the political pursuits to protect their rights. Also, continued failed attempts to pass gun control legislation could also contribute to the lack of political activism by anti-gun interest groups. While more gun control lobbyists' organizations are forming and gaining momentum in terms of membership and funding, these organizations are still drastically behind the pro-gun lobby. If political action is dictated by lobbyists' influences, rationally, the only way for the anti-gun lobby to succeed in its message is to cultivate the same climate and activism as currently seen in organizations such as the NRA or GOA.

The survey (Appendix 1) yielded several interesting findings that help to determine how individuals perceived how lobbying activities influence legislators and the federal government. The findings suggest, that individual's attitudes regarding lobbyists influences are based on political beliefs and views, political party affiliation, and racial or ethnic backgrounds. Results from the survey found that forty-four out of fifty participants acknowledged that lobbyists are

successful at swaying lawmakers' votes regarding pro-gun laws. The participants of the survey who felt like gun rights resonated with their political beliefs had a favorable view of lobbyists who work toward their interests. This group was predominately Caucasian, more prone to own some type of firearm, and politically affiliated with the Republican Party. Based on the findings of the survey, this group's perception regarding lobbyists' influences on lawmakers is well received. To support this finding, Pew Research (2013) states,

However, there is a wider gap in opinions about the NRA's influence between liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans than in December. In the current survey, 77% of liberal Democrats say the NRA has too much influence over gun control laws, up from 59% in December. By contrast, more conservative Republicans say the NRA has the right amount of influence than did so in December (58% now, 46% then) (para. 12).

This finding could be contributed to that fact that pro-gun lobbyists, such as the NRA, receives more notoriety, and based on the research, more affluence in today's politics in reference to gun legislation. In addition to a favorable finding regarding lobbyists' influences, the majority of this group also felt that pro-gun lobbyists are successful at swaying legislators' votes. The successes of the NRA and other pro-gun lobbies resonate with this group and would provide rational that these individuals view lobbyists' tactics of influence as positive discourse in the politics of gun rights. Conversely, more liberal minded individuals, Democratic Party affiliates, did not favor lobbyists' influences on legislators who dictate gun policy. This finding could be supported due to this group owning firearms at a lower rate than their Republican counterparts thus negating their political interests regarding gun rights legislation. Pew Research (2013) states, "The survey finds that gun control supporters continue to lag gun rights advocates on most measures of

political activism” (para. 6). This sentiment may also exist due to Democrats generally backing gun control measures more so than their Republican counterparts. Resnikoff (2014) states,

One hundred sixty-three House Democrats – over 80% of the entire caucus – signed onto an open letter Thursday address to Republican House Speaker John Boehner demanding that he allow “a vote on substantive legislation to address gun violence.” The timing of the letter suggests that Democrats are prepared to make gun control an issue in the 2014 midterm elections (para. 2).

In conclusion, Pro-gun lobbyists are passionately against any legislation that is viewed as an infringement against the right to own and possess a firearm. These organizations will utilize vast amounts of resources in order to convey their message to legislators and influence the voting outcomes of virtually all laws concerning gun rights. A major part of the research was to ascertain whether or not lobbyists’ actions are viewed as negative by voting constituents. To state that lobbyists’ influences are negative cannot be supported by the research. The research has found that whether or not an individual agrees with the influences from lobbyists in terms of gun legislation largely depends on their own political views and attitudes toward gun control. Regardless of this finding, pro-gun lobbyists have an unhealthy influence over legislators and the political institution concerning gun laws. This influence is to the point where popular proposed legislation that is backed by a wide range of Americans from different political views and interest are unable to be passed into law for fear of political retribution from pro-gun lobbyists organizations. This is a problem. Legislators are not able to act and perform the duties they were voted into office to do, which is pass laws and legislate for the good of their constituents. These influences undermine the true essence of how our political institution should govern.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: CONFIDENTIAL SURVEY

The following survey will be used as part of a graduate level thesis research project in the Master of Public Administration program at American Public University System. By taking part in this anonymous survey, your identity will be completely safeguarded by the Principle Investigator (P.I.). The P.I. will be the only individual with access to any completed surveys. The information obtained from the survey will be retained for a total of 5 years in electronic format and then properly disposed. Thank you for your time and participation.

1. What ethnic group do you most associate yourself with?
 - a. Caucasian/White
 - b. African American/Black
 - c. Hispanic/Non-white decent
 - d. Hispanic
 - e. Asian or Pacific Islander
 - f. Other
2. What is your current age? _____
3. What political party do you mostly associate yourself with?
 - a. Democratic
 - b. Independent
 - c. Republican
 - d. Other (please provide name of party) _____
4. Do you currently own any type of gun (rifle, handgun, shotgun, etc)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. If answered yes to question 4, do you have a current concealed weapon permit?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. How would you describe your understanding of the current gun laws in Virginia?
 - a. Very familiar
 - b. Somewhat familiar
 - c. Not familiar at all
7. How would you describe your understanding of how lobbyist interact with Virginia elected officials regarding legislation?
 - a. Very familiar
 - b. Somewhat familiar
 - c. Not familiar at all
8. How would you describe your understanding of how lobbyist interact with Virginia elected officials regarding gun laws?
 - a. Very familiar
 - b. Somewhat familiar

- c. Not familiar at all
9. How would you describe your understanding of how lobbyist interact with your federal (Washington, DC) elected officials regarding gun laws?
 - a. Very familiar
 - b. Somewhat familiar
 - c. Not familiar at all
 10. How often do you feel like your local (Virginia) elected official votes yes on issues that are similar to your views and opinions?
 - a. Very often
 - b. Often
 - c. Not at all
 11. How often do you feel like your federal (Washington, DC) elected official votes yes on issues that are similar to your views and opinions?
 - a. Very often
 - b. Often
 - c. Not at all
 12. To what extent do you think lobbyists are involved regarding gun laws in Virginia?
 - a. Very involved
 - b. Somewhat involved
 - c. Not involved at all
 13. To what extent do you think lobbyists are involved regarding gun laws at the national level?
 - a. Very Involved
 - b. Somewhat involved
 - c. Not involved at all
 14. To what extent do you feel lobbyists are successful at persuading politicians to vote FOR lenient gun laws?
 - a. Very successful
 - b. Somewhat successful
 - c. Not successful at all
 15. To what extent do you feel lobbyists are successful at persuading politicians to vote AGAINST lenient gun laws?
 - a. Very successful
 - b. Somewhat successful
 - c. Not successful at all
 16. Do you feel like lobbyists' activities and interactions with legislators regarding pro-gun laws influence how lawmakers vote on gun legislation?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 17. Do you feel like lobbyists' activities help the legislative process regarding gun laws?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Appendix 2: Institutional Review Board Approval



American Public University System

American Military University
American Public University



Institutional Review Board (IRB)

7 October 2014

Dear Jason Moore,

The APUS IRB has reviewed and approved your revised application # 7-2014-47 (submitted 9/28/2014). The approval covers one calendar year. Should you need an extension beyond the one year time frame, an extension request will have to be submitted. However, this does not mean your research must be complete within the one year time frame. Should your research using human subjects extend beyond the time covered by this approval, you will need to submit an extension request to the IRB.

Sincerely,

Patricia J. Campbell

Chair, IRB