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NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist Poll*

Guns Still a Voting Issue, But...
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This NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist Poll Reports:

While a plurality of registered voters nationally say a candidate's position on gun policy will have a major impact on their vote in November's midterm elections, fewer than previously are intensely motivated by the issue. 46% of voters, down from 59% in February, report that gun policy will heavily influence their vote for Congress. 39%, up from 26%, say a candidate's take on the issue will be a minor factor in their vote, and 14%, little changed from February, think it will not be a factor at all.

The largest shift has been among Democrats. 53% of Democrats, down from 74% previously, say gun policy will be a major factor in deciding their vote in November. A double-digit decline (42% from 54%) has also occurred among independents. Among Republicans, 44%, a modest decline from 49%, say a candidate's position on gun policy will play a key role in deciding for whom to vote in the fall.

"This finding raises a cautionary flag for voters who want gun policy to be front and center this election cycle," says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. "Still, a majority of Americans, overall, want stricter gun control, support efforts to curb gun violence over gun rights unlike in the aftermath of Sandy Hook, and believe the Parkland students have already had an impact on the gun reform debate."

A majority of Americans (52%) want stricter gun legislation to be an immediate priority for the current Congress. Another 19% think it should be a priority but not an immediate one. 27% do not think it is a priority at all. Democrats (75%) are nearly three times as likely as Republicans (26%) to call on Congress to act quickly to pass stricter gun legislation. 50% of independents agree.

Overall, Americans believe it is more important to control gun violence (57%) than to protect gun rights (38%), little changed from a month ago. However, the issue was more divisive in the months following the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. According to the March 2013 Marist-McClatchy survey, 49% of Americans thought the priority should be to control gun violence, and a similar 48% said the priority should be to protect gun rights.

Americans still believe that the Parkland, Florida students who are speaking out after the tragic shooting in their high school have had an impact on gun reform in this country. 79% of Americans say these students are having either a major (33%) or minor (46%) impact on the debate about gun reform. 18% believe they are not having any effect at all, and 4% are unsure.

When looking at specific reforms to gun policy, most voters nationally say they would definitely vote *for* a congressional candidate who wants to increase funds for mental health screening and treatment (91%). There is also widespread and bipartisan support for a candidate who wants to require background checks for gun purchases at gun shows or other private sales (86%).

Many registered voters (60%) also say they would definitely support a candidate who supports stricter gun control laws, and a majority (56%) assert they would definitely vote for a candidate who wants to ban the sale of semi-automatic assault guns. Democrats (83% and 73%, respectively) are more likely than other voters to support a candidate who favors these positions. 32% and 42% of Republicans, respectively, share these views. Among independent voters, 61% say they firmly back a candidate who favors stricter gun laws, and 53% would back one who wants to ban semi-automatic assault guns.

Fewer than four in ten voters (36%) say they would definitely vote for a candidate for Congress who wants to allow school teachers to carry guns or for one who received campaign contributions from the National Rifle Association (NRA). Here, Republicans (60% and 65%, respectively) are more likely than Democrats (14% and 13%, respectively) to definitely back a candidate with these positions. Among independents, 38% report they would definitely support a candidate who wants to arm teachers, and 36% would definitely vote for one who accepts campaign donations from the NRA.