

Impact of NRA on Gun Policy in the United States

Student's Name

Institutional Affiliation

Course Name and Number

Professor's Name

Date

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The National Rifle Association (NRA) is an interest group founded in 1871 to promote and encourage rifle shooting (Musa, 2016). In 1934, NRA's path into politics in the US began with the mailing of its members with information relating to upcoming bills touching on firearms. With its increasingly political involvement, the NRA needed to directly influence policy, and in 1975 it formed a lobbying arm and named it the Institute for Legislative Action (ILA). Together with the Political Action Committee that was formed in 1977, the institute has historically played a major role in gun policy primarily through lobbying (Musa, 2016). This paper will examine the impact of the National Rifle Association (NRA) on gun policy in the US.

The NRA and Lobbying

The NRA has primarily impacted on US gun policy through lobbying. The association has historically engaged directly and indirectly with the government through lobbying to pursue its desired objectives. In particular, the association has lobbied directly by urging lawmakers to take a particular stand on special legislation, through meeting with legislators, and campaign contributions. For example, in 2013, the association spent 3.4 million dollars on lobbying for the constitutional right to bear arms (Musa, 2016). The money to fund these projects comes from both member contributions and such ventures as gun clubs, gun shops, and gun magazines (Schwartz, 2019). In the following years, it spent almost a similar amount on issues touching on ammunition, firearms, civil liberties, and federal budget and appropriation (Schwartz, 2019).

Often, the NRA has relied on former government officials and legislators to lobby on its behalf. For example, before joining the association, Wayne LaPierre, the Executive Vice

Chairman, was a legislative aide to a democratic delegate from Virginia (Musa, 2016). To make lobbying efficient and effective, the NRA has created the Institute for Legislative Action (ILA) as a separate organization and its lobbying arm. The institute also controls the works of the Political Action Committee.

Through these arms, the association has played a direct role in either stopping or passing of various bills on the national state, and local levels. For example, through the ILA, the NRA influenced policymaking in the state of Florida to back up legislation that would prohibit doctors from asking patients if they possessed a gun (Gerhart & Alcantara, 2018). Likewise, the group helped defeat the 2011 bill that would have helped in denying suspected terrorist access to firearms (Musa, 2016).

Historically, the NRA has focused much of its attention on the Congressional committees for lobbying. The Congressional sub-committees are a natural target of many lobbyists because they are the birthplace of legislations (Draper, 2020). With each subcommittee having exclusive jurisdiction over an area of public policy, this level has historically attracted many lobbyists, including those representing the NRA. Consequently, as Rushe (2018) indicates, the NRA spent almost 1million dollars in total lobbying expenditure in 19 house committees with the agriculture, transportation, energy, and armed services committees receiving the most monies (Rushe, 2018).

The NRA has, in the past, lobbied aggressively in Congress in support of some bills. On average, the association lobbies for 100 bills on both the Senate and the House (Allison, 2019). Most of these bills addressed civil rights, guns and ammunition, and firearms. Some of the

lobbying firms hired by the NRA to do the job have included Crossroads Strategies, Forbes and Williams, and Barnes & Thornburg.

The NRA has historically lobbied the executive and the judicial arms of government too. Interest groups and lobbyists target the executive due to the access level that the arm has on technical and political information, as well as some significant resources. However, those that target the executive are less visible than those that lobby the Congress. For example, during the Obama administration, the NRA targeted the executive through advertisements. The NRA was also opposed to the Democratic candidate Obama in 2008. As a result, the association endorsed Paul Ryan and Mitt Romney, Republican candidates, giving them the funds and the votes that come with such an endorsement (Musa, 2016).

A limited level of lobbying can be done at the judicial level too. The NRA has in the past used that platform to influence the outcome of cases that affect the association. Often, lobbying at the judiciary is done through both indirect lobbying and *amicus curiae*. Courts in the United States allow interested parties and interest groups affected by the outcome of a certain case to participate through the filing of briefs.

Through advertisements, clubs, and magazines, the association can draw attention to important court cases. Directly at the courts, the NRA has used *amicus curiae* to hear cases such as *District of Columbia v. Heller* (Musa, 2016). The NRA gathered 46 additional interest groups interested in public safety, gun ownership, and the second amendment (Musa, 2016). All these groups supported *Heller*, who subsequently won the case.

Conclusion

The paper sought to examine the impact of the National Rifle Association (NRA) on gun policy in the US. As revealed, the National Rifle Association has significantly impacted gun policy in the US, primarily through lobbying. The association has spent a significant amount of money to lobby in Congress, the executive, and the judiciary. With many and far-reaching tools, the indications are that the association will continue to impact gun policy in the US for years to come.

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