

Why gun control laws don't pass Congress by Monika L. McDermott

5 *With the carnage in Uvalde, Texas, and Buffalo, New York in May 2022, calls have begun again for Congress to enact gun control. We asked political scientists Monika McDermott and David Jones to help us understand.*

TheConversation: Mass killings are becoming more frequent. Yet there has been no significant gun legislation passed in response to these and other mass shootings. Why?

10 **M.McDermott:** While there is consistently a majority in favor of restricting gun access a little bit more than the government currently does, usually that's a slim majority. We tend to find even gun owners are in support of restrictions like background checks for all gun sales, including at gun shows. So that's one that everyone gets behind. The other one that gun-owning households support is they don't mind law enforcement taking guns away from people who have been legally judged to be unstable or dangerous. Those are
15 two restrictions on which you can get virtual unanimous support from the American public. This isn't something that people are clamoring for, and there are so many other things in the mix that people are much more concerned about right now, like the economy. Also, health care is still a perennial problem in this country. So those kinds of things top gun control legislation in terms of priorities for the public.

20 Nearly half of the public lives in a household with a gun. And those people tend to say that stricter gun laws would not reduce the danger of mass shootings. And that also contributes to why Congress can't or hasn't done anything about gun control.

D.Jones: The last time gun control passed in Congress was the 1994 assault weapons ban. Many of the legislators who voted for that bill ended up losing their seats in the election
25 that year. Some Republicans who voted for it are on record saying that they were receiving threats of violence.

TheC.: Going back to the 1994 assault weapons ban_ How did that manage to pass?

Jones: It got rolled into a larger omnibus bill that was an anti-crime bill. And that managed to garner the support of some Republicans.

30 **TheC:** It sounds like what you are saying is that lawmakers are not necessarily driven by higher principle, but rather cold numbers and the idea of maintaining or getting power.

McDermott: At some point, you have to have a reality check that says if I can't get reelected, then I can't do anything to promote the things I really care about.

35 **TheC:** Some people are blaming the National Rifle Association for these killings. What do you see as the organization's role in blocking gun restrictions by Congress?

McDermott: The NRA is for sure a lobby but it does not control everything in our society. Much of their power is going to the member of Congress and showing them a chart and saying, "Look at the voters in your district. Most of them own guns." Interest groups are not necessarily changing overall public support for an issue, but they're insisting on the
40 opinions of crucial voters that live in a district, and that can sometimes tip an already delicate balance. (523 words)