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FAU Poll Finds Floridians Support Ban on Assault-Style Rifles, Universal Background Checks and Raising Age to Buy Guns

Bill Nelson Edges Ahead of Rick Scott in U.S. Senate Race

BOCA RATON, Fla. (February 28, 2018) – In the wake of a mass shooting that took the lives of 17 students and teachers at a South Florida high school, a vast majority of Floridians support stricter gun laws, including a ban on assault-style rifles, universal background checks and raising the minimum age for gun purchasers, according to a statewide survey by the Florida Atlantic University Business and Economics Polling Initiative (FAU BEPI).

On the political front, Florida Gov. Rick Scott has lost ground to Sen. Bill Nelson in a U.S. Senate race hypothetical matchup. Although Scott has not officially declared his candidacy for the seat currently held by Nelson, the latest poll shows Nelson with a two-point lead over Scott, 40 to 38 percent. An FAU BEPI poll at the beginning of February showed Scott leading Nelson by 10 points.

“The bad news for Scott is his A+ rating from the National Rifle Association (NRA) makes 44 percent of voters less likely to vote for him and only 26 percent more likely,” said Monica Escaleras, Ph.D., director of the BEPI. “A deeper dive into these numbers also finds Independents less likely to vote for Scott, 43 to 17 percent, because of his NRA rating.”

Additionally, Floridians disapprove of U.S. President Donald Trump’s response to the recent mass shooting 49 to 34 percent. Republicans approve 62 to 20 percent, while Democrats disapprove 73 to 16 percent, and Independents disapprove 53 to 23 percent.

Seven out of 10 voters want stricter gun laws while only 11 percent said laws should be less strict and 19 percent said laws should be left as is. A majority of voters of every party affiliation want stricter gun laws, with Democrats most in support at 84 percent, followed by Independents at 69 percent and Republicans at 55 percent.

Universal background checks for all gun buyers are supported by 87 percent of voters, and there is no statistical difference based on party affiliation. Nearly 4 of 5 voters

(78 percent) support raising the minimum age to purchase a gun from 18 to 21, while 69 percent support a ban on assault-style rifles, with 23 percent opposed. A proposal to arm teachers is opposed by 56 percent of voters and supported by only 31 percent, with Democrats opposing by a 74 to 16 percent margin, Independents opposing 57 to 26 percent and Republicans supporting the proposal 53 to 37 percent.

“Gun control may turn out to be a pivotal issue in the midterm elections and could well be the difference in a close race for the Senate between Rick Scott and Bill Nelson,” said [Kevin Wagner](#), Ph.D., professor of political science at FAU and a research fellow of the Initiative. “While large majorities of Floridians support background checks and an increase in the age requirement, it is not at all clear that there is sufficient support for these measures in the Florida legislature. As we are already late in the session, it will take a serious push by Gov. Scott to pass any of these reforms this year.”

The survey also found that 27 percent of voters have either been a victim of gun violence themselves or know someone who has. Among African American voters this number jumps to 51 percent, while only 22 percent of whites and 24 percent of Hispanics have had this experience. Younger voters are also more likely to have been a victim or know a victim of gun violence, with 36 percent of voter’s age 18-34, 30 percent of age 35-54, 23 percent of age 55-74 and 9 percent of those over 75.

When asked what they believe is the major contributor to mass shootings, the availability of guns came in first with nearly 4 of 10 voters (39 percent), while 24 percent selected a lack of mental healthcare. Violent themes on TV and video games came in third at 18 percent, while 14 percent said it’s something else. One-third of Republicans (33 percent) said the lack of mental healthcare was a major contributor of gun violence, while availability of guns was ranked as the major contributor by Democrats (56 percent) and Independents (42 percent).

More than 4 of 10 (41 percent) of voters in the survey own a gun. Republicans (52 percent) are more likely to own a gun than Democrats (36 percent) and Independents (33 percent).

“Independent voters are closer to the Democrats than the Republicans on some of these gun control issues in our poll. That could be a problem for Republicans in the fall,” Wagner said.

The survey, which polled 800 Florida registered voters Feb. 23-25, was conducted using an online sample supplied by Survey Sampling International using online questionnaires and via an automated telephone platform (IVR) using registered voter lists supplied by Aristotle, Inc. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.6 percentage points. Responses for the entire sample were weighted to reflect the statewide distribution of the Florida population. The polling results and full cross-tabulations are available at www.business.fau.edu/bepi.

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About FAU BEPI:

The Florida Atlantic University Business and Economic Polling Initiative conducts surveys on business, economic, political and social issues with a focus on Hispanic attitudes and opinions at regional, state and national levels via planned monthly national surveys. The initiative subscribes to the American Association of Public Opinion Research and is a resource for public and private organizations, academic research and media outlets. In addition, the initiative is designed to contribute to the educational mission of the University by providing students with valuable opportunities to enhance their educational experience by designing and carrying out public opinion research.

About Florida Atlantic University

Florida Atlantic University, established in 1961, officially opened its doors in 1964 as the fifth public university in Florida. Today, the University, with an annual economic impact of \$6.3 billion, serves more than 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students at sites throughout its six-county service region in southeast Florida. FAU's world-class teaching and research faculty serves students through 10 colleges: the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters, the College of Business, the College for Design and Social Inquiry, the College of Education, the College of Engineering and Computer Science, the Graduate College, the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College, the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing and the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science. FAU is ranked as a High Research Activity institution by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The University is placing special focus on the rapid development of critical areas that form the basis of its strategic plan: Healthy aging, biotech, coastal and marine issues, neuroscience, regenerative medicine, informatics, lifespan and the environment. These areas provide opportunities for faculty and students to build upon FAU's existing strengths in research and scholarship. For more information, visit www.fau.edu.