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People want action on guns — but they're not confident elected officials will deliver

By ANTHONY MAN and ARIC CHOKEY
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Fred Guttenberg, an activist against gun violence and father of Stoneman Douglas High School shooting victim Jaime, wants Congress to take action on gun legislation. At left, during an Aug 29, 2019, press conference in Coral Springs is U.S. Rep. Ted Deutch and state Rep. Dan Daley. Public opinion polls show broad public support for banning assault weapons and high capacity ammunition magazines, expanding background checks, and laws allowing guns to be seized from people who may be dangerous. (Taimy Alvarez / South Florida Sun Sentinel)

As the death toll from mass shootings continues to escalate, public opinion polls in Florida and nationally show most people want their elected officials to take action to reduce the access to weapons, especially to people who might be dangerous.

The public supports stronger background checks, curbs on assault weapons, allowing courts to **order seizure of weapons** from people who may be dangerous, banning high capacity ammunition magazines and more.

The South Florida Sun Sentinel analyzed detailed breakdowns from 19 Florida and national polls conducted since 17 people were killed and 17 injured in the February 2018 massacre at **Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School**.

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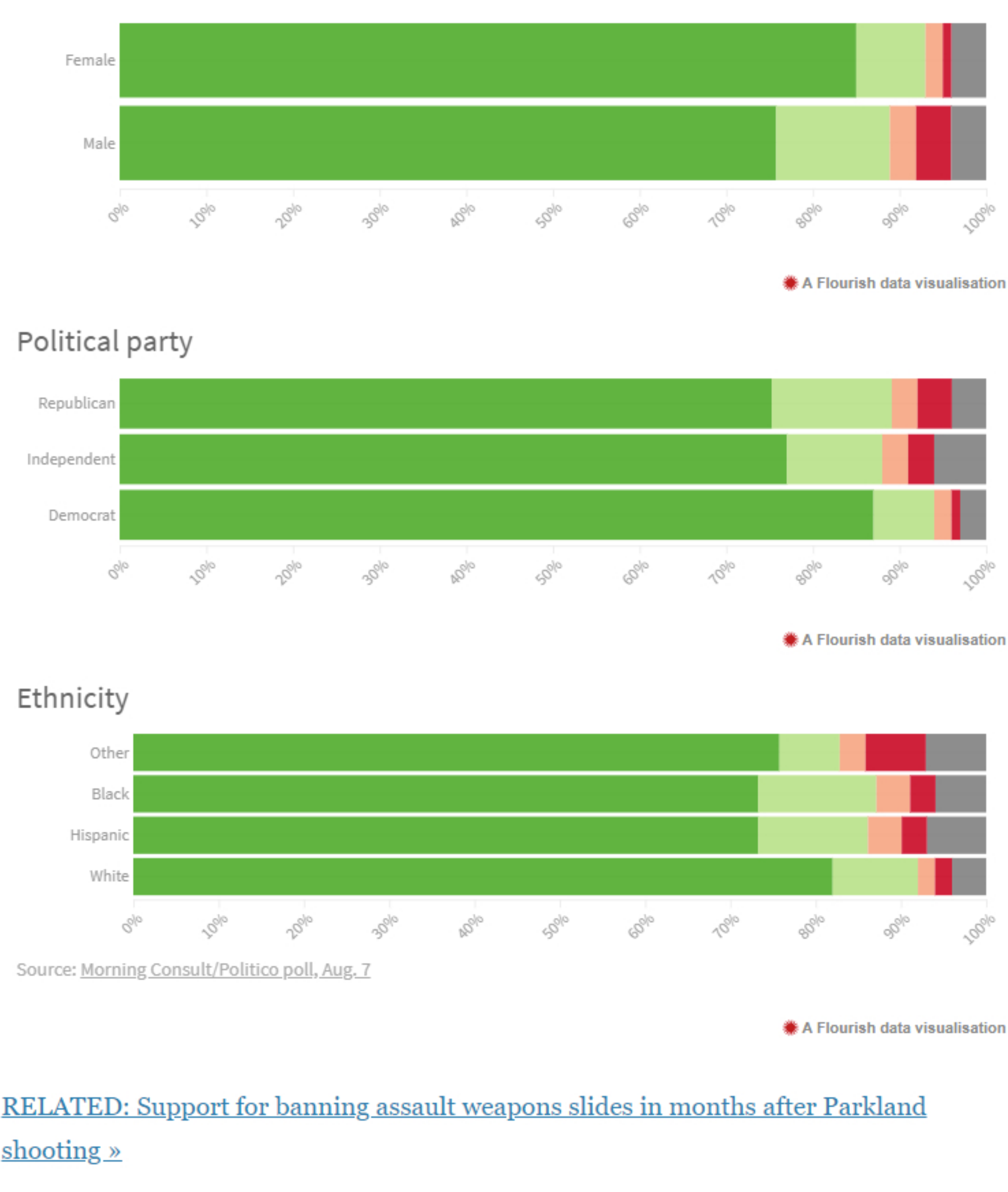
The numbers are revealing. Support for gun restrictions jumps after major mass shootings, then trails off. Opinions vary — sometimes dramatically — based on gender, race and political affiliation. And people have little faith anything will get done.

Men vs. women

There's a large gender gap on many gun-related issues. The most recent Quinnipiac University Poll in Florida found 68% of women wanted stronger gun laws, compared with 47% of men.

On some issues, the gap between men and women is huge. For example, women in Florida support a ban on assault weapons, 72% to 24%. Among men, 45% support a ban and 50% oppose it.

The difference is much smaller, though, on the issue of requiring background checks for all gun purchases. A nationwide Morning Consult/Politico poll released Aug. 7 found 88% of men and 93% of women favor stricter background checks.



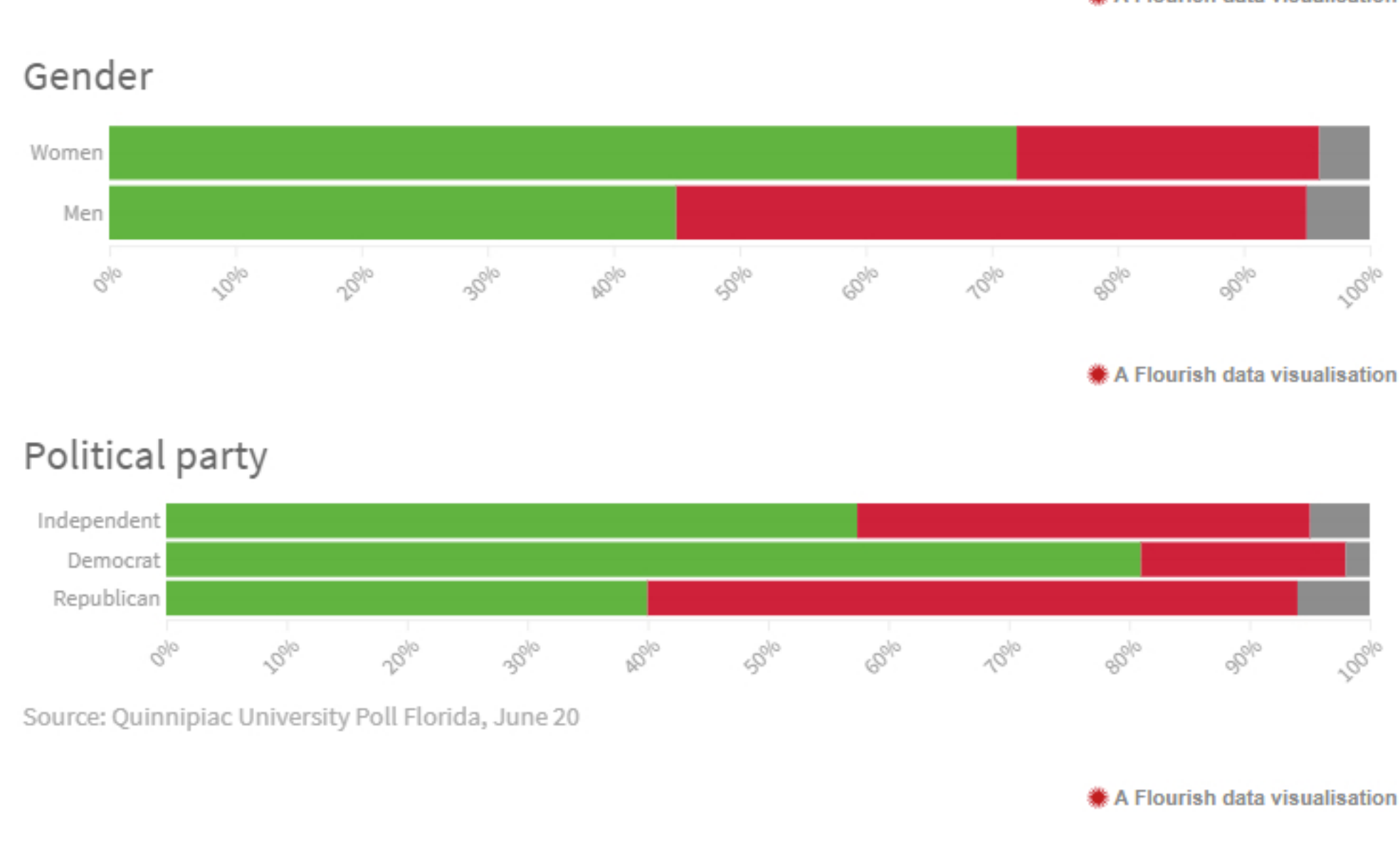
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Interest peaks — then fades — after mass shootings

Support for action is higher in the immediate aftermath of mass shootings, when horrific results dominate the news and are fresh in people's minds. Then it slips.

Two weeks after the Parkland school shooting, the Florida Atlantic University Business and Economics Polling Initiative found 69% of Florida voters supported a ban on assault-style rifles and 23% opposed a ban. The Stoneman Douglas shooter used an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle. In **September 2018**, FAU found support had declined to 51% and opposition had increased to 30%.

That's a **dramatic shift**; immediately after the shooting support was 46 percentage points higher than opposition; seven months later the difference was 21 points.



Increasing support for gun control

People increasingly favor taking action on guns.

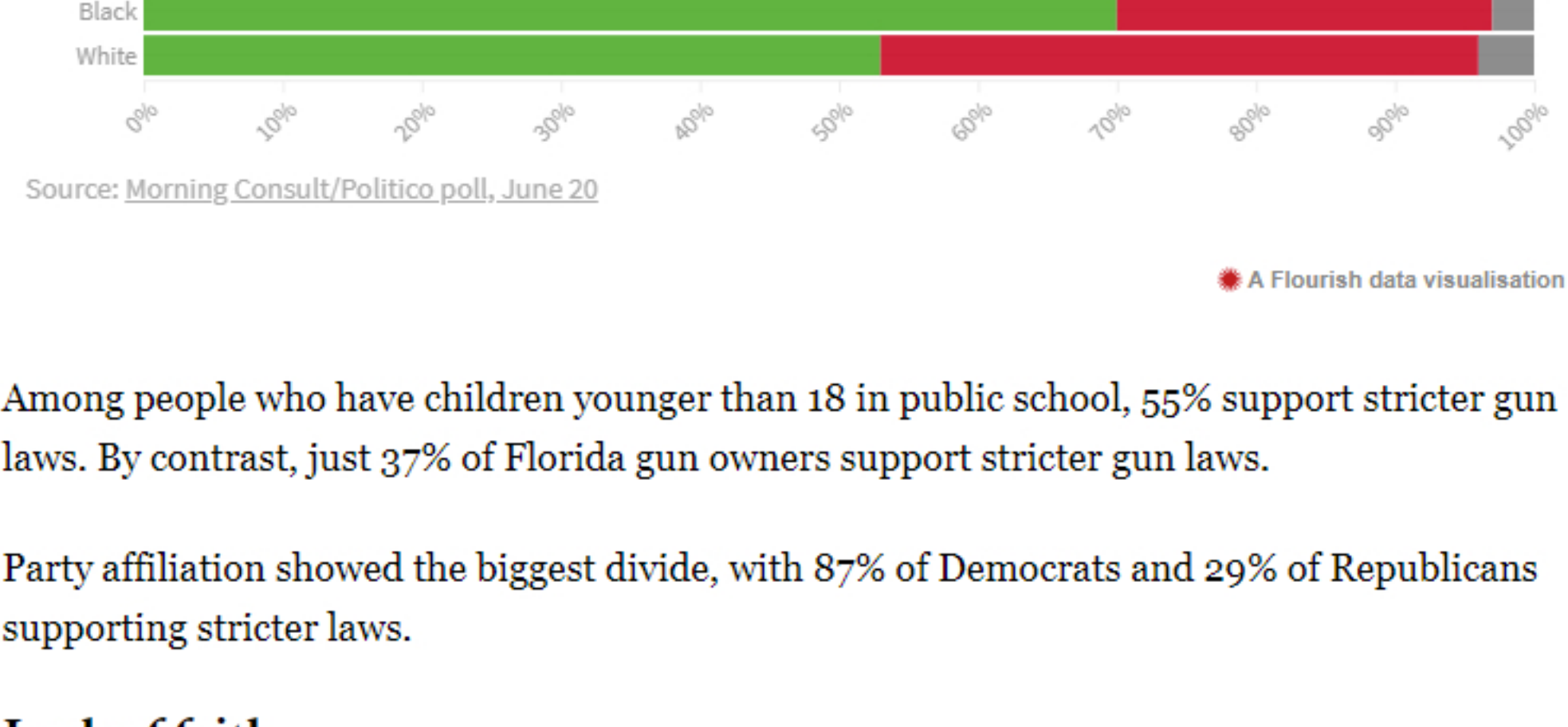
Given a choice — controlling gun violence or protecting gun rights — a nationwide **NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist Poll** released Sept. 10 reported 55% of Americans said controlling gun violence was the priority; 39% said protecting gun rights.

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That 16-percentage-point difference represents a significant shift since the question was first asked in 2013. The result then was evenly split, with 49% prioritizing controlling gun violence and 48% saying protecting gun rights was most important.

Racial differences

The Quinnipiac Florida poll released June 20 found support for stricter gun laws was 70% among black voters, 67% of Hispanics and 53% of whites.

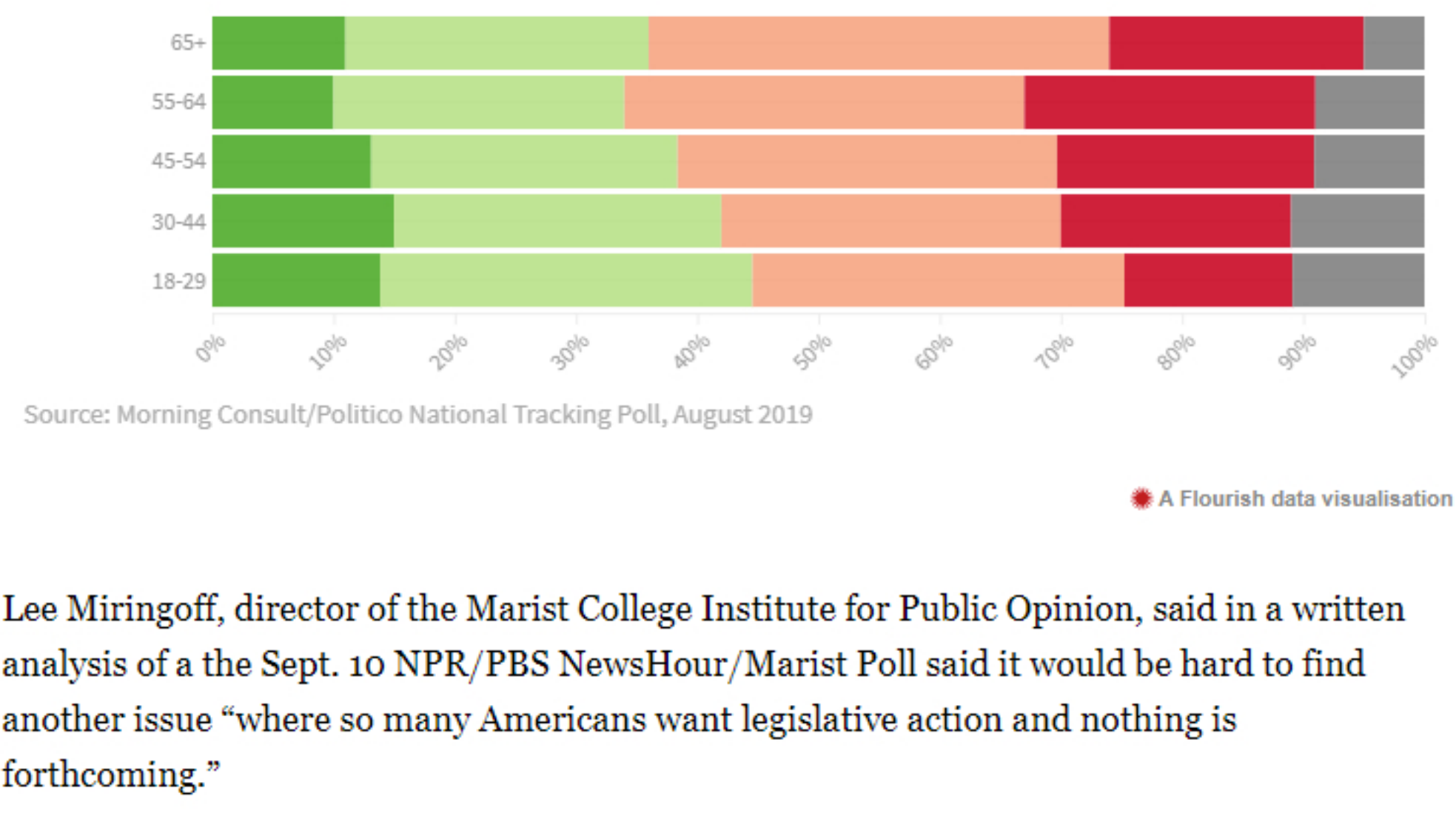


Among people who have children younger than 18 in public school, 55% support stricter gun laws. By contrast, just 37% of Florida gun owners support stricter gun laws.

Party affiliation showed the biggest divide, with 87% of Democrats and 29% of Republicans supporting stricter laws.

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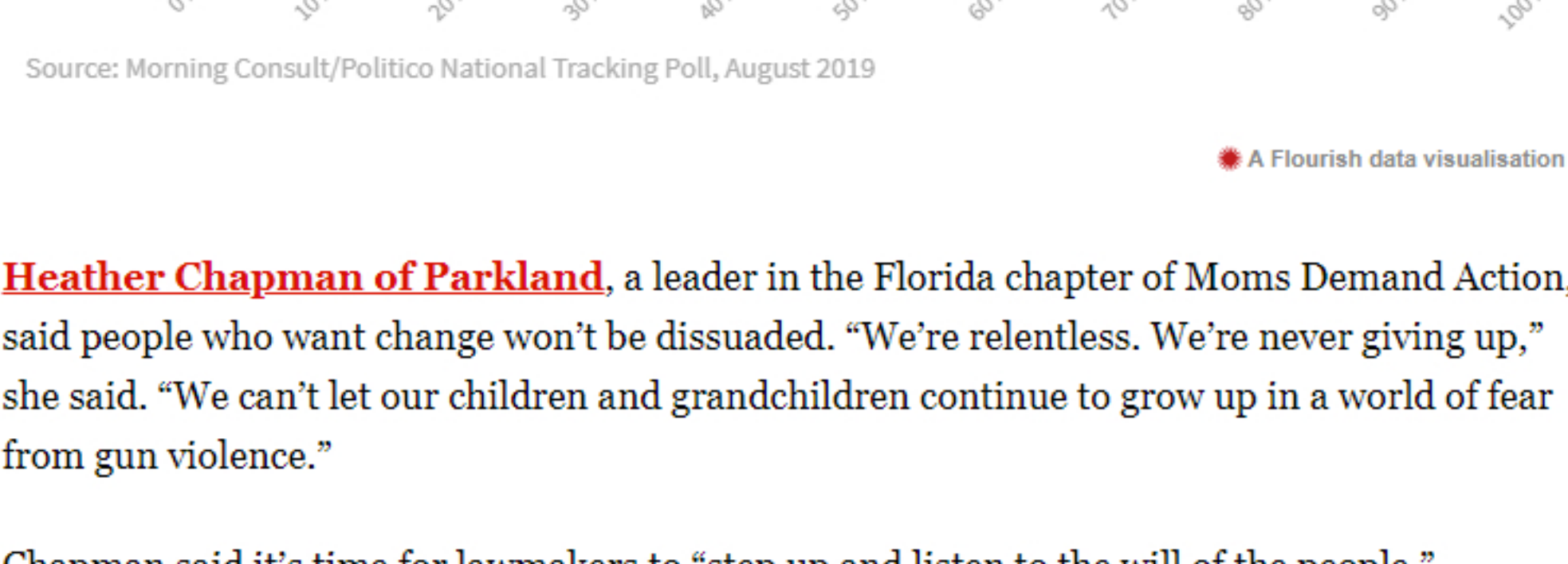
Younger voters were more optimistic about the prospects for action: 45% of voters under age 30 thought Congress would act. Among voters 65 and older, who have more experience seeing how government does and doesn't work, 36% thought something would get done.



Lee Miringoff, director of the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion, said in a written analysis of a Sept. 10 NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist Poll said it would be hard to find another issue "where so many Americans want legislative action and nothing is forthcoming."

One reason why there's support for various policy proposals, but they often founder, is that people who want restrictions don't necessarily make that issue the main factor in their voting decisions, said Kevin Wagner, a Florida Atlantic University political scientist who helps design FAU's polls. "Gun rights supporters tend to vote very specifically on that issue, and gun safety is very often split among a number of issues."

The Democratic-controlled U.S. House is working on a ban on high capacity magazines and a federal red flag law. In February, the House passed legislation to expand background checks for gun buyers. But in the Republican controlled U.S. Senate, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky has said there won't be any action on gun legislation unless President Donald Trump promises to sign it into law.



Heather Chapman of Parkland, a leader in the Florida chapter of Moms Demand Action, said people who want change won't be dissuaded. "We're relentless. We're never giving up," she said. "We can't let our children and grandchildren continue to grow up in a world of fear from gun violence."

Chapman said it's time for lawmakers to "step up and listen to the will of the people."


Randy Lundi of Jupiter, who has been involved the Second Amendment Coalition at the Palm Beach County Trump 45 Club, said some of the proposals to restrict guns are "very dangerous," Lundi said. He said lawmakers need to "be very careful in the ways you try to control the constitutional right."

Anthony Man can be reached at aman@sunsentinel.com or on Twitter @browardpolitics


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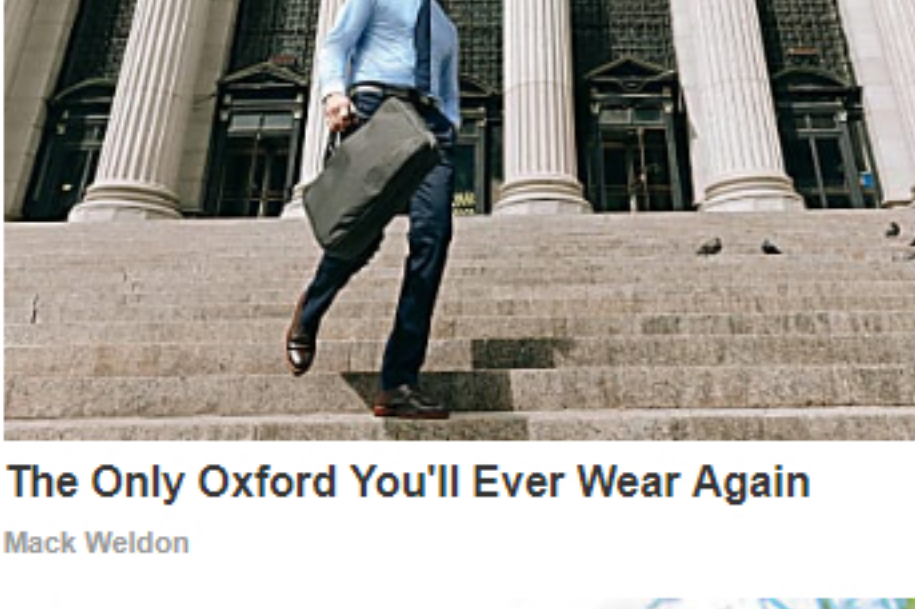
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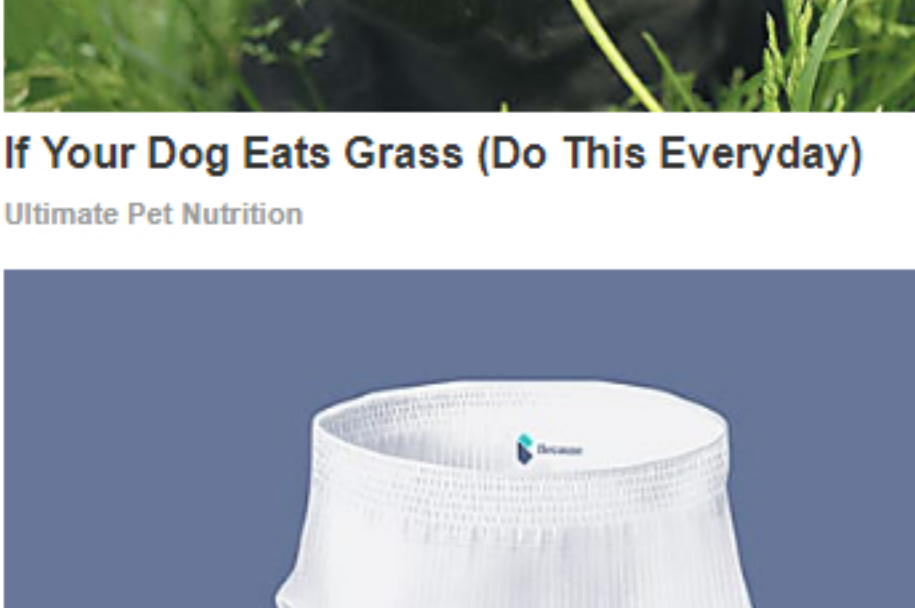
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Arice Chokey is a data journalist for the South Florida Sun Sentinel. He joined the staff in 2017 after covering state government and elections in Indiana for the Associated Press. A native of South Bend, Indiana, Arice attended Ball State University, where he studied journalism.

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