

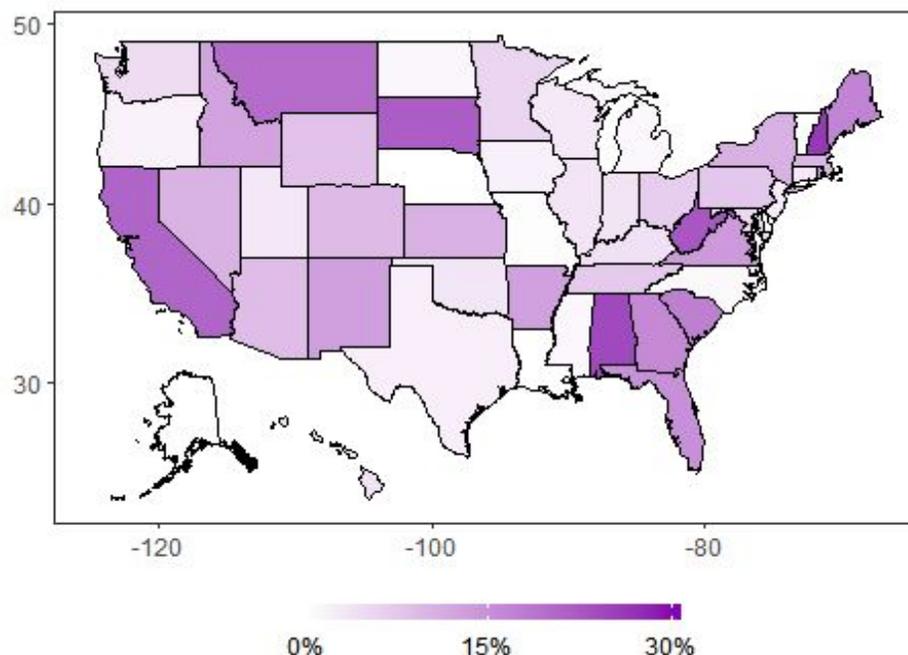
# Student Analysis: Guns in Advertising

**Pro-gun rights airings slightly outpace pro-gun regulation;  
Florida Senate race sees zero gun ads from Nelson, Scott**

by Thafir Elzofri '19, Sofia Headley '21, Allison McGlone '19, Elliot Polur '19

**(MIDDLETOWN, CT) November 6, 2018** - In an analysis of gun-related advertising from January 1, 2017 to October 1, 2018, we find that there were 257,021 federal and gubernatorial ad airings that mentioned guns. This amounts to 9.9 percent of the total ads in this time period. Figure 1 shows the frequency by state of ads in which guns are mentioned in federal and gubernatorial races between January 1, 2017 and October 1, 2018.

**FIGURE 1: Percent of Total Ads Related to Guns by State (1/1/2017 to 10/1/2018)**



Figures includes federal and gubernatorial English-language ads aired on broadcast television that mention guns from January 1, 2017 to October 1, 2018.

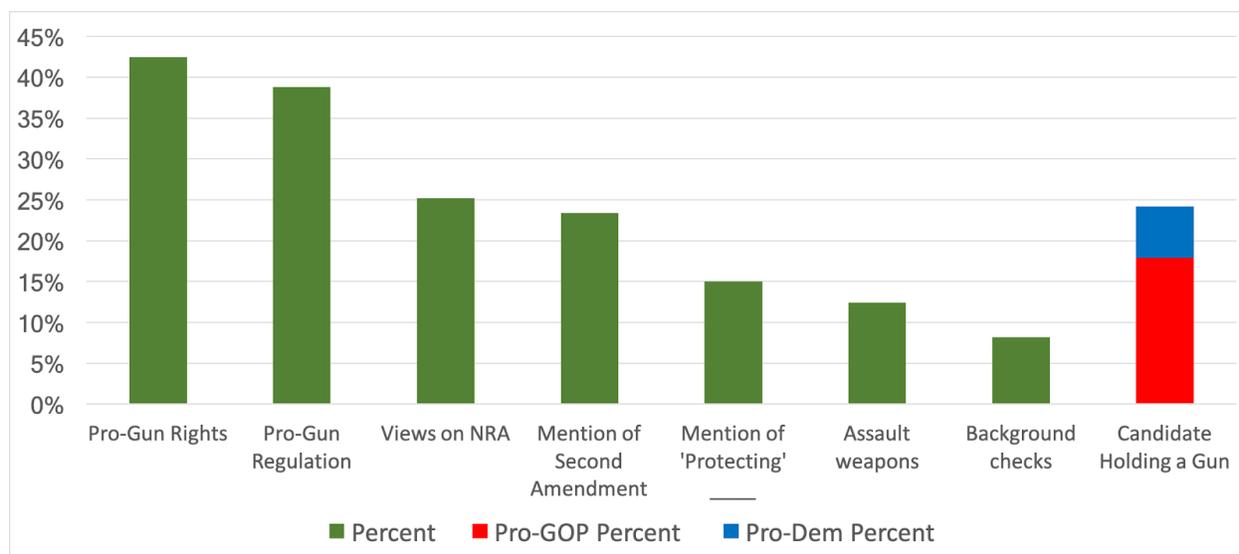
The darkest purple states have the highest percentage of total gun-related ads.

CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Wesleyan Media Project student team analysis of Kantar Media/CMAG data.

In our in-depth content coding, we identified specific gun-related policies appearing in ads and examined significant geographic differences in their discussion. Overall, pro-gun rights ads slightly out-aired pro-gun regulation ads, but this varies widely state to state and region to region. As Figure 2 shows, of these gun-related ads, a pro-gun rights stance was taken in 42.5 percent of ads, and a pro-gun regulation stance in 38.8 percent. Other prevalent references were “NRA” (25.2 percent), mentions of the “Second Amendment/Right to Bear Arms” (23.4 percent), mentions of “Protecting \_\_\_\_” (15.0 percent), mentions of a “Ban on Assault Weapons” (12.4 percent), and mentions of “Background Checks” (8.2 percent).

Out of all gun-related ad airings, candidates were shown holding guns 24 percent of the time, and 73.9 percent of those airings showing a candidate holding a gun were GOP-sponsored ads, 76.1 percent of which featured the favored candidate with a gun.

**Figure 2: Most Prevalent Features of Gun-Related Ads (1/1/2017 to 10/1/2018)**



Figures includes federal and gubernatorial English-language ads aired on broadcast television that mention guns from January 1, 2017 to October 1, 2018.

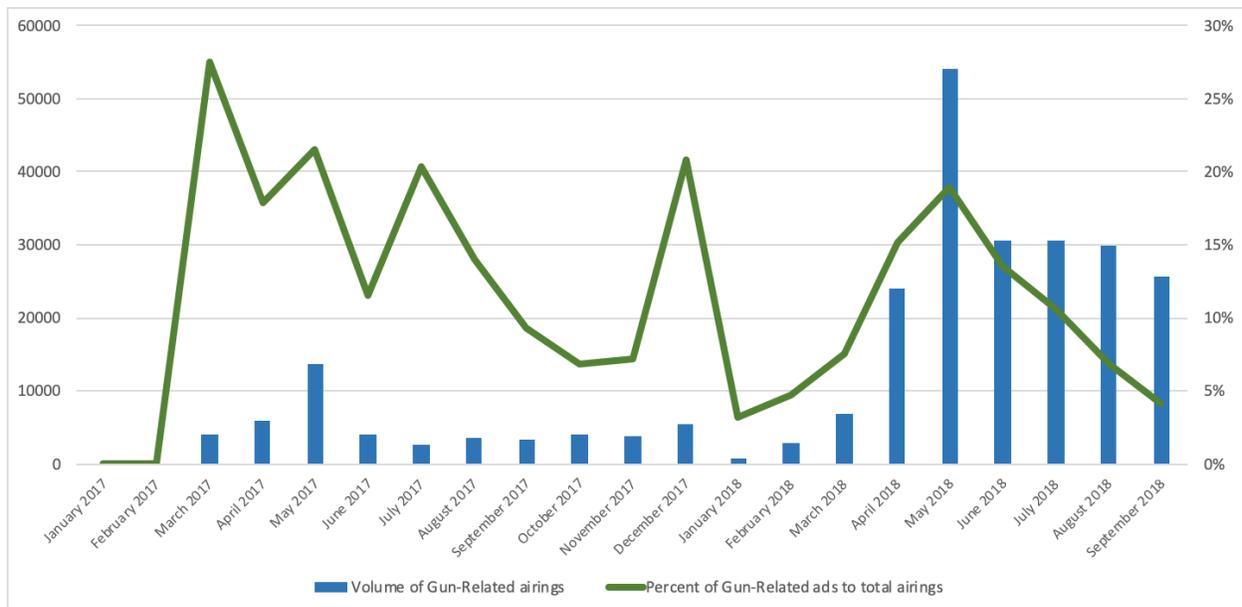
CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Wesleyan Media Project student team analysis of Kantar Media/CMAG data.

As previously reported, the volume and percentage of ads that were gun-related in federal and gubernatorial races have [increased from 2010 to 2018](#), and this trend appears to hold with updated data through October 1, 2018.

Figure 3 shows a high level of variability in the volume and the percentage of gun-related ads out of total ads aired by month from January 2017 through September 2018. Total volume of gun-related airings peaked in May 2018 with

approximately 54,000 ads. The percentage of gun-related ads out of total ads reached a high of 27 percent in March 2017, and reached a low of 3 percent in January 2018. No gun-related ads were aired in January or February of 2017.

**Figure 3: Volume and Percentage of Gun-Related Airings By Month (1/1/2017 to 10/1/2018)**



Numbers include federal and gubernatorial English-language ads aired on broadcast television between January 1, 2017 - September 30, 2018.

CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Wesleyan Media Project student team analysis of Kantar Media/CMAG data.

### State by State Breakdown

Although federal and gubernatorial ads throughout the country included mentions of guns, there was significant state-by-state variability. In Alaska, Delaware, Louisiana, Nebraska, and Vermont there were zero mentions of guns in federal or gubernatorial airings.

Table 1 shows states with the highest percentage of federal and gubernatorial gun-related ad airings.

**TABLE 1: States with the Highest Percentage of Gun-Related Ad Airings (1/1/2017 to 10/1/2018)**

State	Total Ad Airings	Total Gun-Related Ads	Gun-Related Ads %	GOP %	Dem %	Pro-Gun Regulation* Ads %	Pro-Gun Rights** Ads %
NH	2,967	777	26.2%	16.7%	83.3%	83.3%	16.8%
AL	83,899	20,386	24.3%	82.6%	17.4%	0%	93.8%
WV	72,239	16,238	22.5%	81.9%	18.1%	1.7%	81.3%
SD	14,815	3,224	21.8%	88.9%	10.1%	0%	67.9%
CA	97,918	20,337	20.8%	0%	100%	97.2%	0%
MT	143,236	28,280	19.7%	58.4%	41.6%	0.4%	65.8%
FL	248,235	37,207	15%	6.6%	93.4%	72.1%	2.2%

Numbers include federal and gubernatorial English-language ads aired on broadcast television in states where at least 15 percent of airings are gun-related from January 1, 2017 - October 1, 2018.

\*Pro-gun regulation airings include ads that (1) explicitly support pro-gun regulation or (2) explicitly oppose gun rights policies as well as ads that (3) attack candidates for supporting pro-gun rights policies or (4) attack candidates for opposing pro-gun regulation policies.

\*\*Pro-gun rights airings include ads that (1) explicitly support pro-gun rights or (2) explicitly oppose gun regulation policies as well as ads that (3) attack candidates for supporting pro-gun regulation policies or (4) attack candidates for opposing pro-gun rights policies.

CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Wesleyan Media Project student team analysis of Kantar Media/CMAG data.

### California

In total, 97,918 federal and gubernatorial ads aired in California, and 20.7 percent of them were gun-related. None of these gun-related ads were aired by GOP sponsors. Of all gun ads, 83.3 percent of ads were pro-gun regulation ads, and only 16.8 percent were pro-gun rights ads. Furthermore, in 96.3 percent of all gun-related ads, the candidate positively featured in the ad supported pro-gun regulation policies.

### Montana

Montana's midterm election cycle was particularly notable for its high volume of ads, and specifically gun-related ads, in relation to the state's size and number of congressional representatives. In total, 143,236 ads aired in Montana during the time period surveyed, and 19.7 percent of these were gun-related. Republicans aired 58.4 percent of the total ads and Democrats aired 41.6 percent. Of all gun related ads, 0.4 percent were pro-gun regulation ads, whereas 72.1 of all gun-related ads were pro-gun rights ads. In 57.9 percent of ads, the candidate shown favorably in the ad

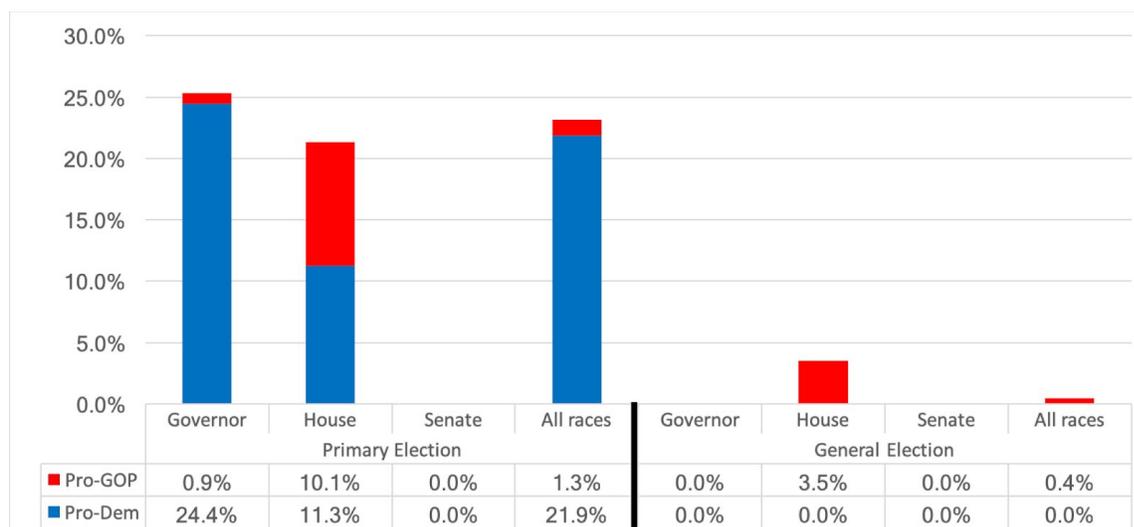
supported pro-gun rights policies, and in 30.5 percent of the ads, a candidate targeted negatively in the ad was said to support pro-gun rights policies.

## Florida

Of the 248,235 federal and gubernatorial ads that were aired in Florida in the first 21 months of the 2018 cycle, 15 percent (37,207 airings) were gun related. Nearly half (42.2 percent) of all gun-related ads mentioned school shootings, and 30.3 percent mention the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, FL (February 14, 2018). In the month of August, school shootings were mentioned in over 10,000 airings nationally, but 93 percent of those mentions were in the state of Florida. All ads mentioning school shootings during the primary in Florida were run by Democrats.

Figure 4 shows the percent of all ads across the state that were gun related, broken down by the office sought and the election. The race for governor had a higher percentage of gun mentions than the races for U.S. House or U.S. Senate. The two major Senate candidates (Bill Nelson - D and Rick Scott - R) ran zero gun-related ads in both their respective primaries and the general election. Similarly, the general election gubernatorial race did not feature any gun-related ads through October 1.

**Figure 4: Party Breakdown of Gun-Related Ad Airings by Race in Florida (1/1/2017-10/1/2018)**



Numbers include federal and gubernatorial English-language ads aired on broadcast television in Florida from January 1, 2017 - October 1, 2018. \*General election data includes ads from 8/29/18-10/1/18  
 CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Wesleyan Media Project student team analysis of Kantar Media/CMAG data.

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

Data reported here from Kantar Media/CMAG do not cover local cable buys, only broadcast television, national network and national cable buys.

Data in this report cover federal and gubernatorial English-language ad airings from January 1, 2017 to October 1, 2018 and were analyzed as a part of a WMP lab course (GOVT378) in the Department of Government at Wesleyan University. Our student team conducted an in-depth content analysis of the ads identified by Kantar Media/CMAG as mentioning or featuring guns. We developed a codebook to assess the content related to guns and rigorously tested its reliability through an iterative process using Cohen's kappa. All content features discussed in this report achieved intercoder reliability of at least 0.78, with the exception of coding for "Protecting Schools", which only occurred in 5% of airings making intercoder reliability challenging. We report on it here because its low volume is substantively interesting despite the low kappa of 0.65. Out of a total of 436 unique ad creatives during the above time period that mention gun issues (according to Kantar Media/CMAG) our team successfully coded all 436.

Figure 1 created by Elizaveta Kravchenko '19. Table 1 created by Sofia Headley '21. All other Figures created by Elliot Polur '19.

The **Wesleyan Media Project (WMP)** provides real-time tracking and analysis of political advertising in an effort to increase transparency in elections. Housed in Wesleyan's Quantitative Analysis Center – part of the Allbritton Center for the Study of Public Life – the Wesleyan Media Project is the successor to the Wisconsin Advertising Project, which disbanded in 2009. It is directed by Erika Franklin Fowler, associate professor of government at Wesleyan University, Michael M. Franz, professor of government at Bowdoin College and Travis N. Ridout, professor of political science at Washington State University. WMP staff include Laura Baum (Project Manager), Dolly Haddad (Project Coordinator) and Matthew Motta (Research Associate). Elizaveta Kravchenko '19 serves as the course assistant for Gov378, the WMP lab course.

The **Wesleyan Media Project** is supported by Wesleyan University and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Data are provided by Kantar Media/CMAG with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project. WMP is partnering again this year with the

**Center for Responsive Politics**, to provide added information on outside group disclosure.

Periodic releases of data will be posted on the project's website and dispersed via Twitter [@wesmediaproject](#). To be added to our email update list, click [here](#).

### **About Wesleyan University**

Wesleyan University, in Middletown, Conn., is known for the excellence of its academic and co-curricular programs. With more than 2,900 undergraduates and 200 graduate students, Wesleyan is dedicated to providing a liberal arts education characterized by boldness, rigor and practical idealism. For more, visit [wesleyan.edu](#).

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