

THREAT ANALYSIS:

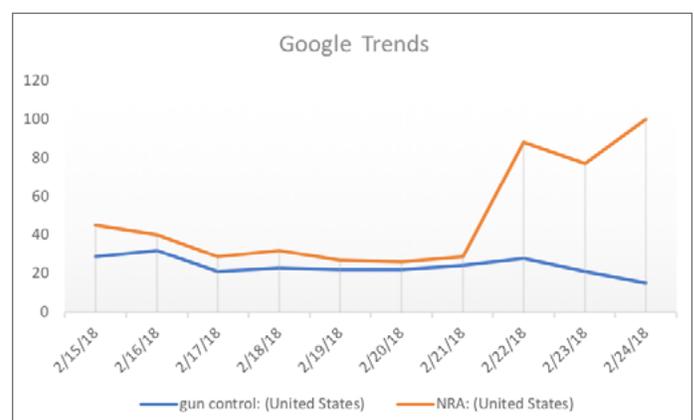
THE SHIFTING CONVERSATION ON GUN CONTROL AND HOW IT MAY AFFECT DESTINATIONS

The February 14th mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida reignited a heated debate on gun control in the United States. It also demonstrated once again the need for destination organizations to have a crisis team and plan in place in order to respond swiftly and effectively when faced with such a situation. In this policy brief, we will examine the rapidly changing conversation in wake of the Florida shooting and how it affects our industry, and address what the growing trend in consumer boycotts means for destination organizations.

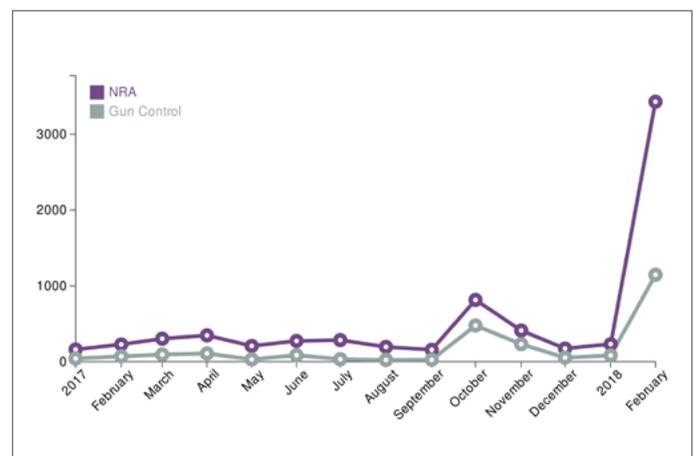
A Shifting Conversation On Gun Control in America

In the wake of the shooting, polling showed that public opinion in the U.S. on gun control was moving. According to a Quinnipiac University poll, American voters support stricter gun laws 66 - 31 percent, the highest level of support ever measured by the independent poll. "Support for stricter gun laws is up 19 points in little more than two years," Tim Malloy, assistant director of Quinnipiac University poll, said in a statement.

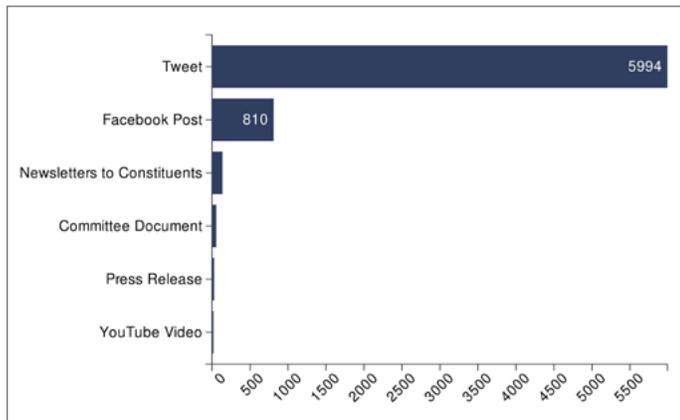
We've seen public opinion shift following traumatic events in the past. What's different about this incident is a shift in the conversation, from a general conversation on gun control to a very targeted conversation regarding the National Rifle Association of America (NRA), led in large part by the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. An examination of Google searches in the United States in the days following the incident shows searches for "gun control" and "NRA" mirroring each other in the immediate aftermath. But as the searches for gun control begin to drop off, we saw a dramatic increase in searches for "NRA".



Utilizing the Quorum platform to monitor political conversations, we see a similar pattern. We tracked political conversations around "gun control" and the "NRA" going back to 2017. The two topics of conversation seem to go hand in hand, with the trend lines again mirroring each other. That all changes in February of 2018. While we do see a spike in conversations around gun control, we see a much bigger increase in conversations around the NRA.



What's also interesting is where these conversations are taking place, with over 80 percent of the mentions taking place on Twitter.



This demonstrates the way that social media is changing politics in America and the need for advocacy groups to monitor these conversations. Our partners at Quorum have built an [interactive auto-updating spreadsheet](#) for you to track statements released by members of Congress mentioning gun reform or the NRA.

As the conversation shifted directly to the NRA, gun-control activists organized a boycott of companies with ties to the association. The #BoycottNRA hashtag spread quickly on social media, prompting Delta, United Airlines, Hertz, Enterprise, Avis and other companies to cut ties with the NRA. This isn't the first time consumers have attempted to target companies that offer discounts to NRA members, but it is the first time such a move has seemed to get any traction.

Supporters of the NRA have countered with calls to boycott the companies who cut ties with the association, with one group sharing a [list of additional companies](#) to boycott who they claim don't respect the rights of gun owners. Political leaders have joined in, with Georgia Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle, saying on Twitter that he would "kill any tax legislation that benefits @Delta unless the company changes its position and fully reinstates its relationship with [the] @NRA."

What This Means For Destinations

In the week following the shooting in Parkland, Florida, Dallas Mayor Pro Tem Dwaine Caraway pressed the NRA to move its convention — planned for May in Dallas — to another city. Caraway said he was seeking to put citizens first, and found hosting the convention at this time to be inappropriate, warning that if the event went forward, it would be met with "marches and demonstrations."

"I am saying to the NRA, reconsider yourselves coming to Dallas," Caraway said. "There will be marches and demonstrations should they come to Dallas and we, Dallas, will be the ones that have to bear the cost and the responsibility and to protect the citizens."

Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings issued a statement saying he disagreed with the NRA's viewpoint and tactics, but "they have a legal contract that was signed in 2012 and I'm not advocating that we violate that agreement. Hopefully we will take the opportunity in Dallas to engage in meaningful dialogue about how we work together to end mass killings in America."

At the same time representatives from Kansas and other states have called for the association to move the meeting to their respective states, where they claim there is broad support for the second amendment.



The NRA has stated that they plan to move forward with the meeting in Dallas, an event expected to draw 80,000 attendees and contribute an estimated \$40 million to the city.

The NRA's Annual Meeting is not the only event the association holds. There are regional chapter events, trainings and seminars which take place across the country. If your destination is hosting an NRA meeting in the coming months, you need to understand that you may be a target of political protest or the target of a travel boycott. If you are unsure if there are scheduled NRA meetings in your destination, you can perform a quick search on the association's website: <http://findnra.nra.org/>.

Travel as a Boycott Target

Student activist David Hogg, who survived the shooting at Majory Stoneman Douglas High School earlier this month, has called on prospective tourists to boycott Florida for spring break in order to force legislators' hands when it comes to gun reform. "Let's make a deal DO NOT come to Florida for spring break unless gun legislation is passed," Hogg wrote on Twitter. "These

[politicians] won't listen to us so maybe they'll listen to the billion dollar tourism industry in FL. #neveragain." Hogg later added, "Better Idea: Spend your spring break in Puerto Rico, it's a beautiful place with amazing people. They could really use the economic support that the government has failed to provide. #SpringBreak2018 #SBinPurtoRico #itsspelled PUERTO RICO".



Using travel as a political weapon or tactic to achieve political change — through a travel boycott, government travel ban or travel advisory — to change a law or policy is nothing new. North Carolina and HB2 is the highest profile example. Groups like the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), ACLU and the NAACP have achieved a lot of publicity advocating for travel boycotts or issuing travel advisories. Government is no stranger either, with California being the top state for enacting travel bans. They currently ban reimbursement of travel by state employees to Alabama, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee and Texas.

The past two years have seen an unending series of politically sparked boycotts and counter-boycotts. Why have customers been so aggressive in their insistence on holding companies accountable? And why are companies willing to respond to these pressures? According to experts, an increasingly competitive business environment and changing consumer expectations play a major role.

For years, American businesses have been trying to differentiate themselves from their competitors based on their values, instead of just their products. It's helped them build brand loyalty, and the stated values are something customers consider when deciding where to spend their money. According to the Harris Poll's most recent "Reputation Quotient" study, 60 percent of consumers surveyed had decided not to do business with a company because of something they learned about how the company conducts itself.

"This conversation is really at the front end of what every board room in America is thinking about," Wendy Salomon, Vice President of Corporate Reputation at market-research firm the Harris Poll told Business Insider. "It's no longer about, 'Should I give to the local school, is my supply chain sustainable?' That's what it used to be. Now, it's about, 'Should I lead with my values? Should I engage with these issues? Should I talk about the value of diversity? Am I allowed to abstain from that conversation?'"

Customers now expect — and sometimes demand — that companies take stands on political issues. "Companies have to be known for something, and it's not just your products and services," Chris Allieri, Founder of the communications and marketing firm Mulberry & Astor, said. "It's who are you, what do you stand for." In other words, tying your brand to certain values and political beliefs is one way to differentiate yourself.

As destinations are increasingly becoming the target of boycotts, the next question that very well may be facing our industry is "can destination organizations continue to sit on the sidelines of these political conversations"? As stewards of our destination brands, do we need to follow the lead of the corporations and engage in political conversations, even at some general level?

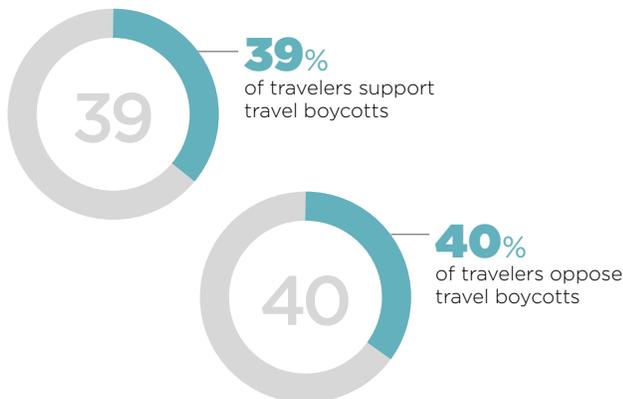
The reality is that shared values are becoming brand differentiators for destinations as well, even more so than traditional tourism products or experiences, and destination organizations need to take this into consideration.

Weaponization of Travel Research

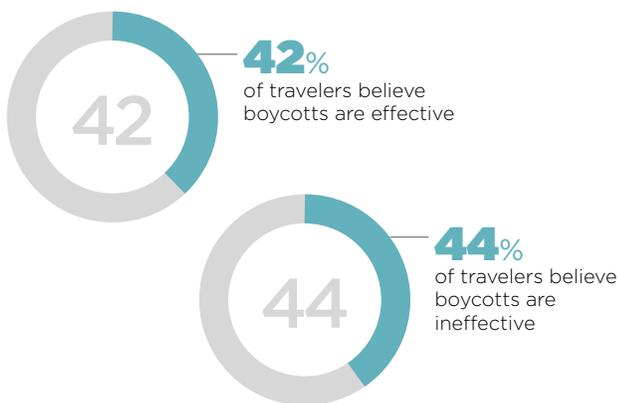
The good news is that as our [Weaponization of Travel Study](#) demonstrated, destination organizations are also one of the most trusted sources for those who have yet to take a position on boycotts. We are uniquely positioned to add a trusted voice to the conversation and have a real influence on public perception.

In the meantime, a few points from our [Weaponization of Travel Study](#) are worth noting in this current environment.

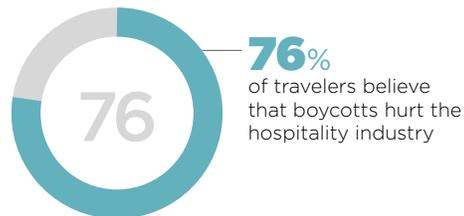
- Travelers are split on whether they support or oppose boycotts. 39 percent support them, 40 percent oppose and 22 percent have no opinion with 15 percent strongly support compared to 22 percent who strongly oppose.



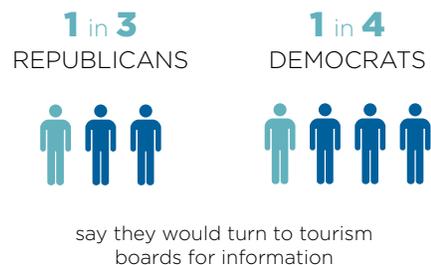
- The mixed opinion is, in part, a function of perceived efficacy. Nearly an equal number say boycotts are an effective tactic in compelling state action (42 percent) as those who do not (44 percent). On this measure, neither side appears to feel strongly nor have the advantage (intensity on both sides is just 15 percent).



- There is opportunity to message on boycott ineffectiveness, especially how boycotts hurt local business/employees much more so than politicians. Neither side is convinced on whether boycotts work or not. However, there is strong consensus (76 percent of travelers) that boycotts hurt the hospitality industry, particularly local hotel and restaurant owners and employees. On the converse, perceived damage to politicians is viewed as very limited.



- Tourism boards are a trusted source. Large numbers of both Democrats (1 in 4) and Republicans (1 in 3) say they would turn to tourism boards for information. Tourism boards are also one of the most trusted sources for those who have yet to take a position on boycotts.



Conclusion

As shared values play a larger role in consumer decision making, the new reality facing destination organizations is that local laws, legislation and political conversations impact a destination’s brand. Destination organization leaders need to be paying attention to the conversations taking place around their communities, and be prepared to respond to situations that arise before they escalate.

For more information, please contact advocacy@destinationsinternational.org