

Gun sales soar again after presidential election

ANNA M. TINSLEY

LAST UPDATED: NOVEMBER 26TH, 2012 10:00 AM (PST)

FORT WORTH -- Michael Hill has been stockpiling guns and ammunition for almost a decade.

But he's not done -- not since President Barack Obama was re-elected this month.

In a continuing trend that alarms gun control proponents, Hill and thousands of other Americans are buying up ammo, handguns and other firearms, citing concerns that Obama might push new regulations in his second term or that U.N. agreements might infringe on the U.S. gun market.

"I have purchased more since the election," said Hill, 49, of Watauga. "I hear a lot of buzz about ... putting more restrictions in place.

"There's a lot of paranoia out there," he said. "But [Obama] has nothing to lose now because he won't be re-elected again."

Gun and ammo sales locally are on the rise -- about twice as high as they were this time last year -- even though sales can't match the mad rush that cleared out many gun stores after Obama was elected in 2008.

Weapon and ammunition shortages could be on the horizon if gun lovers keep up this pace.

Gun control advocates say they don't understand the rush to stock up on firearms, ammunition, magazines and more.

"I personally think it's very silly," said Marsha McCartney, a spokeswoman for the Texas chapter of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. "The president has not done anything in four years to make them think he's coming to get their guns.

"It's a sad commentary on what people are telling these people to keep them frightened."

Before taking office, Obama said he respected the constitutional right to bear arms. But after more than three dozen Chicago children were killed in 2007, he also said he wanted to restore the ban on assault weapons.

In the days after the 2008 election, people began stocking up on firearms and ammunition, eventually creating a shortage. It took nearly a year for supplies to become more plentiful and for prices to come down.

After this year's election, sales of ammunition and firearms again were pretty heavy, said DeWayne Irwin, owner of the Cheaper Than Dirt Outdoor Adventures gun store in north Fort Worth.

"Sales are well over twice as much as this time last year," he said, but he noted that "it's not even close to what we saw in '08."

Some shoppers have mentioned concerns that Obama might have held back on big changes during his first term to ensure that he would be re-elected. Now that he's won, big changes may lie ahead, they say.

While no shortages have occurred, demand for guns and ammo is strong.

Anticipating a sales rush after the election, Irwin himself stocked up on popular items, from all types of ammunition and magazines to AR-15s.

And he believes shortages loom in the not-too-distant future.

"I think all this will die down in the next six or eight months or maybe a year," Irwin said.

"Then something will happen -- maybe talk of an assault rifle ban -- and it will all come up again.

"When it does, it will be bigger than in '08."

Assault weapons ban

President Bill Clinton signed the last so-called assault weapons ban on Sept. 13, 1994. A couple of months later, voters went to the polls and the House and Senate flipped from Democratic to Republican control.

When the ban came up for reauthorization in Congress in 2004, the measure failed.

During one of this year's presidential debates, Obama echoed his desire for a similar ban.

"Weapons that were designed for soldiers in war theaters don't belong on our streets," he said during the Oct. 16 debate with Republican Mitt Romney. "And so what I'm trying to do is to get a broader conversation about how do we reduce the violence generally. Part of it is seeing if we can get an assault weapons ban reintroduced.

"But part of it is also looking at other sources of the violence. Because frankly, in my hometown of Chicago, there's an awful lot of violence and they're not using AK-47s. They're using cheap handguns."

Obama's response -- and re-election -- drew praise from the national Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence.

"We were heartened by the president's response and stand ready to work with President Obama and leaders of both political parties in Congress to adopt and implement effective policies to reduce gun violence," Brady Campaign President Dan Gross said after the election. "Numerous polls show that the overwhelming majority of Americans, including gun owners and NRA members, support sensible policies, like criminal background checks, that will save lives.

"We look forward to working ... to make this the safer nation we all want and deserve."

Other concerns

Some worry that ongoing talks by the United Nations on an Arms Trade Treaty could lead to a reduction of overseas firearms being sold in the United States -- and potentially even a ban on private ownership of firearms here.

"It's obvious that our warnings over the past several months have been true," said Alan Gottlieb, founder and executive vice president of the Washington-based Second Amendment Foundation, a group promoting better understanding of the constitutional right to own firearms. "We have to be more vigilant in our efforts to stop this proposed treaty."

Others worry that Obama, during his second term, will have time to name one or two more justices to the Supreme Court who might not embrace individual gun rights as much as some already on the court.

"I believe Obama is anti-gun and I think he eventually will try to take them away from people," said Ron Cody, a 70-year-old Jack County resident who recently shopped at Cheaper Than Dirt.

There's general widespread concern about what Obama might do in a second term, he said.

"People are afraid of what [Obama] has said and the judges he has appointed," Cody said.

"Future [Supreme] Courts are what we are worried about the most.

"The young people didn't think about that when they voted, I guess."

McCartney, of the Brady Campaign, said she doesn't think the best way to approach concerns is to stockpile ammunition and weapons, especially when most cities are safer than they were years ago.

"I can't imagine that it's very safe to have a stockpile of ammunition in your home," she said. "It's sad that people feel such fear in their communities."

Rising sales

Gun sales have been on the rise nationwide in recent years.

Through October, the FBI has received more than 14.8 million inquiries from people running criminal background checks on potential gun buyers -- compared with 16.4 million in 2011, 14.4 million in 2010, 14 million in 2009 and 12.7 million in 2008, according to the most recent records available.

Those figures were 11.1 million in 2007, 10 million in 2006, 8.9 million in 2005, 8.6 million in 2004 and 8.4 million in 2003, FBI records show.

Texas had around 1 million such requests in each of the past four years, records show.

The value of some weapon manufacturers went up after Obama was re-elected.

Sturm, Ruger & Co. and Smith & Wesson saw their stock prices increase, and Benchmark Co. estimates that firearm sales have grown about 10 percent each year since Obama was first elected, up from a 7 percent growth rate.

"We expect that with President Obama's re-election, these sales could continue well into his second term," Mike Greene, a Benchmark analyst, wrote in a note to clients.

Some gun shoppers say their current purchases have nothing to do with politics.

Craig Shewmake has bought two AR-15s since the election, but he said the timing is coincidental.

"I kind of think end times are coming, so I'm loading up," said Shewmake, 39, of Granbury.

"Our president is our president and I have respect for our government.

"But my personal opinion is if America is going to let me have a gun, I will."