

Obama pushes gun control as gun sales peak, Trumpism's causes and characteristics and Cruz vs. Big Corn: US national blog roundup for 2 – 8 January

USAPP Managing Editor, **Chris Gilson** looks at the best in political blogging from around the Beltway.

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President Obama, the Democratic Party, and the GOP

This week President Obama announced a new set of executive actions to tighten up existing gun control measures. These include strengthening the effectiveness of the existing background check system, giving more money to enforcement agencies, increasing funding for mental health services, and supporting the development of safer gun technology. On Tuesday, *Political Animal* [writes](#) that despite conservative opposition, Obama's gun actions are both modest and constitutional. *Red State* meanwhile [says](#) that the new measures are a mix of overreach and the obscene and won't make people safer. *Monkey Cage* [argues](#) Wednesday that Obama's executive actions are not a step towards a "new imperial presidency" as many in the GOP have maintained. Instead, they say, his actions show how limited the president actually is in taking such actions when Congress is unwilling to take action.

Thursday evening saw President Obama give a Town Hall meeting to discuss his actions on gun control – *Red State* has [four takeaways](#) from the meet, writing that it showed that the actions were all about him, and also that Obama was out of his element, and that his explanations made no sense.

Turning to the Democratic Party, *The Fix* [writes](#) this week that the news of the retirement of Steve Israel (D-NY) after 16 years is the latest signal that House Democrats are running out of leaders.

Moving on to the Republican Party, *Political Animal* [says](#) that in their vehement opposition to Democratic measures such as gun control they are "going for broke" for the support of the angriest 20-30 percent of the population. Still on the GOP, *Red State* has the [news](#) this week that South Carolina Governor, Nikki Haley has been picked by the party to give its response to President Obama's State of the Union address next week. They [say](#) that the two-term governor is a good choice given that she's on many people's short-list to be a candidate for the Vice-Presidency.

Elections and the road to 2016

No matter what the polls are saying about how the candidates are doing, this year's election is looking like very good business for cable news, [writes The Fix](#). They say that Fox is averaging 1.8 million weekday viewers because of its election coverage, and is in second place for the first time ever.

On Sunday, *Red State* [comments](#) that President Obama is attempting to make the 2016 election about guns, which is surprising since gun policy is rated as an important issue by a very small number of Democrats – let alone voters in general.

Who is going to win this year? For the answer, *Townhall* [reckons](#) that we should look to the betting markets, not to the pundits. At the moment, the betting markets are suggesting that Florida Senator Marco Rubio will come out on top, with his Senate colleague from Texas, Ted Cruz, in second. Former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton has a 55 percent chance of winning the election, they say.

On Thursday this week, *Sabato's Crystal Ball* looks at [five factors](#) which will define the running mates of the eventual presidential candidates, including that the position is not just for white men anymore, and that the eventual running mate is not likely to be running for president now.

The Democrats' 2016 campaign

This week *Crooks & Liars* [bemoans](#) what they say is the Democratic Party's "crazy debate schedule" which saw the last debate happen on a Saturday night and the next (on the 17th) on a Sunday evening. They argue that the schedule is hiding the party's candidates and allowing the GOP to frame the election narrative. *The Atlantic* [reports](#) or an op-ed written by President Obama this week where he vowed not to campaign or support any candidate who does not support gun reform – including those from his own party.

Moving on now to the Democrats' field of candidates:

Hillary Clinton



Former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton Credit: Hillary for America (Flickr, CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0)

- Hillary Clinton was accused of lying about Donald Trump being used as an ISIS recruitment tool after the last Democratic debate. If her statement wasn't accurate then, it is now ([Political Animal](#)).
- Former president Bill Clinton made his campaign debut for Hillary Clinton this week in New Hampshire ([Post Politics](#))
- Clinton may end up underperforming her polling in the early state of Iowa and New Hampshire because the support for her from party officials may be inflating people's perceptions of her chances ([FiveThirtyEight](#)).
- Why Clinton's email travails are still important ([The Federalist](#)).

Bernie Sanders

- The last fundraising quarter of 2015 saw the Senator from Vermont raise more than £33 million ([Post Politics](#)).
- Sanders has a plan to make banking more affordable for most Americans by putting caps on credit card interest rates and ATM fees ([The Atlantic](#)).
- Sanders would “love, love, love” to run against Donald Trump this year ([Post Politics](#)).

The Republican Party’s 2016 campaign

This week, *Political Animal* [argues](#) that Republicans are stuck in an argument from the 1990s over immigration reform. Unlike 20 years ago, more Mexicans are returning home than are coming into the US.



With the 2016 primary campaign now in full swing and the first primaries only weeks away, *Crooks & Liars* [looks](#) at the rise of attack ads aimed at giving candidates an edge in these early states. Speaking of the primaries, *FiveThirtyEight* [reckons](#) that in order to win in Iowa or New Hampshire, it may actually be better to be polling worse nationally. *Red State* [writes](#) on Monday that record turnout is predicted for the GOP’s Iowa Caucuses – potentially 10-15 percent higher than 2012’s record of 121,000 votes cast. *The Fix* meanwhile [says](#) that it’s still too early to pick winners in either Iowa or New Hampshire given surprising results compared to polling in previous years. Maybe we shouldn’t be worried about the results in both of these states in any case – *American Thinker* [argues](#) that they won’t matter because neither of them are representative of the country at large. Whatever the results in Iowa and New Hampshire, we should know who the GOP’s nominee is by March 15 [says](#) *The Fix*.

On Sunday, *Roll Call’s Hawkings Here* [asks](#) a very interesting question – could a brokered GOP convention this summer lead to a nomination for Speaker of the House (and former Vice Presidential candidate) Paul Ryan? Looking to the post-convention period, *Powerline* [says](#) that the GOP’s enthusiasm gap (where 71 percent of Republicans are looking forward to the election compared to only 44 percent of Democrats) should lift the party in November’s general election. [According](#) to *PoliticusUSA* the GOP is getting worried that a nomination for either Ted Cruz or Donald Trump might destroy the GOP for a generation. Speaking of the New York billionaire:

Donald Trump

- Why Trump gets away with lying so easily ([Crooks & Liars](#))...
- ... and why “bitter” voters keep hanging on to him ([Daily Kos](#)).
- Trump’s supporters aren’t uninformed, they’re just misinformed ([FiveThirtyEight](#)).
- The eight causes of Trumpism – starting with Ronald Reagan ([The Atlantic](#))...
- ...followed by its four characteristics ([The Hill’s Congress Blog](#)).

- Though the idea is now decades old, Trump is now claiming that he invented the idea of a border fence with Mexico ([Red State](#)).



Donald Trump Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

- Trump is the Democratic version of 2008’s “Operation Chaos” which saw Republicans vote for Hillary Clinton in Democratic primaries on the assumption that she would be easier to beat than Barack Obama ([United Liberty](#)).
- Trump isn’t Rudy Giuliani – he’s more of a Howard Dean ([Red State](#))
- Donald Trump’s first television ad paints a “dystopian nightmare” of fear ([The Fix](#))...
- ... though it does use imagery from Morocco to show “Mexicans” swarming across the border ([FreakOutNation](#)).
- Trump also this week alleged widespread voter fraud –despite the evidence to the contrary ([Post Politics](#)).
- Is the GOP’s establishment “blowing” its campaign against Trump? ([FiveThirtyEight](#)).
- In order to take Trump down, his rivals are going to have to attack him personally ([The Federalist](#)).
- This week saw Donald Trump unleash a new “birther” strategy against his rival, Ted Cruz, accusing the Texas Senator of potentially not being eligible for the presidency due to his being born in Canada ([The Fix](#)).
- Why no other Republican can beat Trump at the ballot box ([Daily Kos](#)).
- If Trump can win the GOP nomination, then he can probably win the presidency ([The Fix](#)).
- Maybe we shouldn’t worry – President Trump would be different than Candidate Trump ([Red State](#)).
- If Trump does win, can he “restore America”? ([American Thinker](#))

Ben Carson

- Last week saw the campaign of the retired neurosurgeon begin to implode – a reflection of the “con-artistry” that has overtaken the Republican Party ([Political Animal](#)).
- In the hopes of bolstering his faltering campaign, Carson this week announced his flat tax plan which would see individuals and corporations both taxed at 14.9 percent ([Post Politics](#)).

Jeb Bush



Former Florida Governor, Jeb Bush Credit: Michael Vadon (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

- This week the former Florida Governor announced a new drug control proposal which would include better access to drug courts and encourage better parenting ([Post Politics](#)).
- Things may be getting so bad for the Bush campaign that he's now considering campaigning with his brother, former President George W. Bush ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Jeb Bush may have never been ready for anything ([Daily Kos](#)).
- Many seem to agree with this sentiment – the biggest donor to Bush's SuperPAC recently stated that he is “not living up to expectations” ([Post Politics](#)).

Marco Rubio

- The Florida Senator is actually more far right than Donald Trump when it comes to critiquing President Obama's foreign policy ([Red State](#)).
- [Post Politics](#) looks at Rubio's many fights with other GOP candidates going into the early primaries
- Given how messy a process it would likely be, Rubio's proposals for a constitutional convention are a “really bad idea”. ([Political Animal](#)).

Ted Cruz

- Iowa's corn lobby is apparently following around the Texas Senator “like a bunch of spoiled children” because of Cruz's opposition to their sacred cow – the Renewable Fuel Standard ([Red State](#)).
- How beating Big Corn in Iowa can help Cruz win in New Hampshire, and thus the nomination ([American Thinker](#)).
- Seven things one learns attending Ted Cruz events ([Post Politics](#))
- Cruz's campaigning is “Machiavellian” in its brilliance ([Red State](#)).
- Cruz is also placing his biggest campaign bet on the South – and is looking beyond Iowa to Super Tuesday on March 1st. ([FiveThirtyEight](#)).
- Senator John McCain of Arizona this week joined Donald Trump in attacking Ted Cruz's eligibility for the presidency based on his birth ([Red State](#)).
- Despite what everyone is saying, it would seem that Ted Cruz is in fact a “natural born citizen” ([The Volokh Conspiracy](#)).
- In any case, Cruz's birther spat with McCain and Trump are helping him in Iowa ([Post Politics](#)).

Chris Christie

- This week saw Fox news attack New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie's presidential campaign, accusing him of never being in the state he's supposed to be governing ([PoliticusUSA](#)).
- Christie this week made a compelling argument as to why the GOP shouldn't nominate Donald Trump ([The Fix](#))
- Christie was apparently for guns, and then against them, and now he's for them again ([Daily Kos](#)).
- There's no real evidence that Christie's campaign is having a resurgence –it's just that he's a "tiresome blowhard" which is pushing up his profile in the media ([Red State](#)).



New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie Credit: Gage Skidmore (CC-BY-SA-2.0)

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

On Friday, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at why unions are worried about an upcoming Supreme Court Case. They say that the case – which is over the requirement for California teachers who are not union members to pay union dues – could severely weaken unions' bargaining and financial power if the decision goes against the California Teachers Association.

This week also saw militants take over an empty wildlife refuge building near to Burns, Oregon. *The Daily Signal* [explains](#) why the government is taking a different tack in its response to the protestors compared to similar confrontations in the 1990s that saw large losses of life.

Federal Eye [reports](#) on Wednesday that the IRS has a new plan that would see it communicate with citizens on a solely electronic basis, moving away from telephone and mail based correspondence and assistance.

House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) is only a few months into his new job, and already talk of a primary challenge has been circulating in retaliation for his perceived compromises with Democrats over the budget last year. *Smart Politics* [says](#) that a 2016 Tea Party challenge is likely to fail – only one US Representative from the badger State has lost a primary since 1950, and nearly 90 percent of incumbents have won by double digits. *Roll Call's 218* [writes](#) this week that the reconciliation of bills between the House and Senate hasn't always been the "street fight" that we saw this week over a bill which would repeal most of the Affordable Care Act and ban the government from funding Planned Parenthood.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Monday this week, *American Thinker* [argues](#) that the Chinese threat to the US is growing, citing that country's new DF-21D "carrier-killer" missile. They write that ignoring Chinese and Russian provocations is par for the course for President Obama, and that he has left the US with a woefully diminished military capability to deal with potential threats.



U.S. Army Spc. Justin Towe scans his area while on a mission with Iraqi army soldiers from 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division in Al Muradia village, Iraq, March, 13, 2007. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Andy Dunaway) (Released)

Red State [writes](#) this week that the US should get its military out of Afghanistan immediately and that the battle for the future of the country is now between the Taliban and ISIS. Despite all the money, time, training and equipment that the US had provided to the Afghan security forces over the last 14 years, they are still outgunned and outperformed by their opponents, they say.

On Tuesday, *Political Violence at a Glance* [looks](#) at the insufficiency of simply winning in ground combat. They say while the US Army's goal is "to win" the aftermath of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated that leaders must be ready for the political disorder that such victories can help to create.

On Saturday, Saudi Arabia executed Shiite cleric, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr and 46 other religious leaders. *Crooks & Liars* [wonders](#) if the US will respond by cutting the \$50 billion arms sales that have taken place under the Obama administration. Saudi Arabia's executions saw widespread protests in Iran. *American Thinker* [says](#) that we may be seeing the beginnings of a new Cold War between the two countries, who are engaged in struggle for geopolitical hegemony in the region, and that the US' lack of leadership in the region is a real problem.

Post Politics has the [news](#) this week that President Obama's trade pact – the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) has received an important endorsement in the form of a thumbs-up from the National Association of Manufacturers.

Obamacare and health policy

On Tuesday this week, *The American Interest* [looks](#) at the rapid increase of workers' health care costs compared to their wages. They say that this suggests that the Affordable Care Act – also known as "Obamacare" – has had the wrong goal of expanding health insurance coverage rather than cost control. *Daily Kos*, also [discusses](#) Obamacare, saying that the "lie" of death panels has finally been killed now that doctors and clinician are, from this week, being reimbursed for talking with all of their patients about end-of-life care. *Wonkblog*, meanwhile [says](#) that despite its opponents' claims that Obamacare would discourage large numbers of Americans from working and force

many into part-time jobs, three new studies suggest that this hasn't happened at all. Still on Obamacare, *Daily Kos* [writes](#) Wednesday that the expansion of Medicaid is working – in the states where it's been allowed. They comment that two new studies have shown that low-income patients have better access to care, and hospitals are doing better financially in those states that have expanded Medicaid.

This week Republicans in Congress passed a bill which would repeal most of the Affordable Care Act, one that President Obama will "happily veto". *The Atlantic* [says](#) that while the Congressional GOP knew full well that Obama would veto the bill, they have proven that they can use the Senate's reconciliation rules to get a bill past the Democrats in the chamber and on to the president's desk – something that will be very handy if a Republican

occupies the White House from January 2017. *Perspectives* also [writes](#) on the GOP's Obamacare "repeal", commenting that the bill would mean that Republicans would pocket the \$1 trillion in new revenue and savings (most have which have come from Medicare savings) that have paid for Obamacare, using them for tax cuts for the wealthy.

The debate over gun control

This week saw the gun control debate flare up again after President Obama announced a new suite of executive actions aimed at strengthening existing gun laws. *FiveThirtyEight* [says](#) that more than 80 percent of Americans agree with President Obama that more gun buyers should get background checks. The general acceptance of background checks is a reason why Obama's executive orders should be quite popular, as is the fact that most Americans think that it is too easy to buy a gun, [writes](#) *The Fix*.



Credit: Will O'Neill (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)



Credit: Kris (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

Whether Americans [support](#) the president's executive actions or not, gun sales hit a new record ahead of their announcement, reports *Wonkblog*. Black Friday last year was the largest gun-purchasing day ever, with 185,000 background checks processed. Each gun owning house now owns more than eight guns on average, up from just over four in 1994.

Hit & Run [writes](#) on Tuesday that those who own guns mistrust Obama on the issue because of his continual promises of "more" laws and "more" regulations to address gun violence. They say that these rules are likely to have little impact, which means that demands for even greater restrictions will inevitably follow. *The Daily Signal* is similarly [critical](#) of Obama's claims about guns, arguing that purchasing a gun online can often require a background check, and that so-called "smart gun" technology is still some ways off.

Crooks & Liars [investigates](#) why gun control laws work in other countries, but not in the USA. They say that the short answer is that Australian and British politicians are more likely to put aside their "fealty" to special interests who fund their campaigns after significant gun massacres.

The economy and society

On Sunday, *Political Animal* [argues](#) that the armed group who seized an empty federal building in rural Oregon should be treated just as ISIS terrorists would be – with force. *The Fix* meanwhile [looks](#) at ten other government standoffs similar to the one this week in Oregon, including the 1993 standoff in Waco, Texas that saw 86 deaths.

Daily Kos this week [comments](#) on some of the ways it “sucks to be a woman” in contemporary US society. From longer restroom queues to higher costs for clothing and personal care products, to the gender pay gap, and the lack of representation in politics compared to men, they say it’s time for women’s status as second-class citizens to change.

Why do Americans work so much? *The Atlantic* [investigates](#), suggesting that inequality means that the gains from workers’ increased productivity is not being shared, and people now have to work harder – and longer – to maintain living standards. *Daily Kos* has some slightly [better news](#) for workers – 2013’s tax increases on the wealthy did not hurt jobs or economic growth, despite what many on the right had predicted.

According to new polling, Americans overwhelmingly support the idea of police officers wearing body cameras, [writes Hit & Run](#). They say that people understand that such cameras are there to protect the police as well as protecting citizens from law enforcement.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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