Poll: Americans want government out of their lives

By Aaron Blake, Washington Post

Americans have a very special message for the federal government: Don't tread on me.

That's the takeaway from a new poll from the Pew Research Center in which, for the first time in at least the last two decades, a majority of Americans say Washington actually poses a threat to their "personal rights and freedoms."

And it's not just tea party supporters, Republicans and gun owners.

Nearly two-fifths of Democrats (38 percent) say the government is a threat to them personally, as do 45 percent of non-gun owners.

Overall, the percentage of Americans who view the federal government as a threat has increased from 36 percent in May 1995 to 53 percent today. It rose late in the 1990s and then dropped again after 9/11, down to 30 percent.

Today, most Americans now feel at least somewhat scared of what the government could do to them, and 31 percent see Washington as a "major threat."

This is an important piece of data to keep in mind as Congress debates new gun legislation. While polls show broad support for expanding background checks and limiting the manufacture and sale of certain types of so-called assault weapons, the flip side of that is that many Americans are wary of their government going too far in restricting their constitutional rights — be it on guns or anything else.

And if gun rights supporters can convince the public (and

members of Congress) that the legislation creates a too-powerful federal government that impinges on people's rights and freedoms, they may help reverse their early deficit in the polls.

The American public is very receptive to such a message.