

1996 National Gun Policy Survey  
of the National Opinion Research Center:  
Research Findings

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## Introduction

Gun violence is a major social problem in the United States. Consider the following:

Each year nearly 40,000 deaths and over 100,000 non-fatal injuries are caused by firearms (Singh, Kochanek, and MacDorman, 1996 and Zawitz, 1996).

The United States leads the industrialized world in the level of gun-related deaths (House, 1996; "Guns...", 1997).

Firearm-related deaths are the fourth leading cause of premature deaths (i.e. years of potential life lost before age 65, Div. of Violence Prevention, 1994).

In 29% of non-fatal, violent crimes (robbery, aggregated assault, and sexual assault) the offender was armed with a gun (Zawitz, 1996).

To explore public opinion on measures dealing with the gun violence problem, this report examines 1) attitudes on gun control and how they have changed over time, 2) the factors that shape public opinion on gun control including a) socio-demographics, b) beliefs about guns and gun control, c) trust in government, d) the salience of crime and other problems, e) gun ownership, f) having been threatened with a gun, and g) pro- and anti-gun control activism, and 3) issues related to the past and future accession of firearms including a) ownership patterns, b) sources of information about guns, c) features of guns considered by buyers, d) reasons for not owning guns, e) intra-household disagreements about guns, and f) the potential appeal of safer firearms such as childproof and personalized handguns.

It utilizes data from 1) the 1996 National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago in collaboration with the Center for Gun Policy and Research of Johns Hopkins University with funding from the Joyce Foundation of Chicago, 2) the 1972-1996 General Social Survey (GSS) of NORC, and 3) various public opinion surveys by Gallup, Yankelovich, AP/Media General, and Harris.

The NGPS is a national, random-digit dial, telephone survey of adults living in households with phones. Data were collected from September 13-November 11, 1996. Analysis used a post-stratification weight that adjusted for age, gender, race, education, and region according to US Census figures. Full technical details on the NGPS appear in Haggerty and Shin, 1997. The GSSs are full-probability, in-person interviews of adults living in households in the United States. Data were collected in February-May, 1996. Full technical details are presented in Davis and Smith, 1996. The various other public opinion surveys are RDD telephone surveys of adults except as noted.

## Gun Control Policies

Support for gun control is strong and widespread (Table 1 - see also Blendon, Young, and Hemenway, 1996; Brennan, Lizotte, and McDowall, 1993; Kleck, 1991; Smith, 1980; Vernick, et al., 1993; Wright, 1981 & 1988). Majorities back 11 of 13 proposed measures to regulate firearms. This includes over 80% supporting 1) the childproofing of all new handguns, 2) the mandatory registration of handguns, and 3) limiting handgun sales to one or less per month. 70-80% favor 1) government regulation of the safety design of guns, 2) background checks for the private sale of guns by individuals, and 3) limiting licenses to sell guns to stores rather than private individuals. 60%+ say that 1) handgun owners should be licensed and required to take gun safety training (or that restrictions should be even stricter than this), 2) there should be mandatory registration of longguns (shotguns and rifles), 3) new handguns should be personalized so that only their legitimate owners could fire them, and 4) private gun sellers should be liable for crimes committed by guns they sold if they failed to do a required background check. And 53.5% feel that concealed, carrying permits should be restricted to those with special needs such as private detectives. In addition, a plurality of 48.5% think that taxes on gun dealers should be doubled (45.6% are opposed and 5.9% are undecided or ambivalent).<sup>1</sup> Only two measures are not backed by at least a plurality. 35.2% favor restricting handguns to police and other authorized people and just 16.1% support a total ban on handguns. Overall, of the 13 measures the average person backs 8.2 of them. 24.0% endorse 11 or more of the policies, 51.1% 7-10, and 24.9% 6 or fewer.<sup>2</sup> Thus, not only does a majority of people favor most policies, but most people favor a majority of measures.

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<sup>1</sup>The relatively low level of support for increased taxes is explained by two factors. First, people are in general opposed to more taxation. Second, many people favor limiting licensed gun dealers by restricting licenses to store owners rather than via higher taxes. 39.9% back both higher taxes and licensing only stores, 27.4% no tax increase, but licensing only stores, 7.7% higher taxes, but no restriction to stores, 1.1% for taxes and unsure on license limitations, 3.5% for limitation to stores and unsure on taxes, 17.1% both no taxes and no limitation to stores, and 2.2% opposed to one and unsure on the other and 1.2% unsure on both measures. That means that 71.9% favored one or more measure to limit licensed gun dealers and that a majority of those who opposed higher taxes supported the limitation of licensed gun dealers to stores.

<sup>2</sup>This gun control scale, which will be used in further analysis, runs from 0 for someone who opposes all 13 measures to 13 for someone who supports all measures. On the item that asked about four gun control policies only those supporting a total handgun ban were counted as pro-gun control.

Looking at public opinion on these 13 control measures shows the type of policies that the public endorses. First, people overwhelmingly favor what has been called the automobile model of gun control (Wright, 1981). The state regulates automobiles by requiring the licensing of drivers, the registration of motor vehicles, the documentation of sales, and the safe design and operation of automobiles. The majority of people favor a parallel system of regulation for firearms. They want the owners of handguns licensed and trained or handguns banned outright (69.8%), want handguns registered (81.3%), want sales more carefully controlled (e.g. requiring private sellers to do background checks - 77.4% and restricting the licensed gun dealers to stores - 70.3%),<sup>3</sup> want the safety of weapons regulated by the government (74.6%), and favor such innovative safety measures as childproofing (85.8%) and personalizing handguns (68.0%).

Second, people want to plug up certain loopholes in current statutes. They want to subject private gun sales to many of the conditions that now cover licensed, commercial transactions (by requiring background checks and making sellers liable if background checks are not conducted and the sold guns are used in crimes), to limit gun licenses to people running stores, and to reduce the wholesale circumventing of strict gun laws in some states by restricting guns sales in less restrictive states to one per month or less (80.7%).<sup>4</sup>

Third, while people support a wide range of gun control measures, they are not anti-gun per se and don't support the banning of firearms in general or even handguns in particular. Also, people are more in favor of the control of handguns than they are of regulating longguns. While majorities back the mandatory registration of both types of guns, 81.3% favor it for handguns compared to 66.3% for rifles and shotguns. (For similar findings about greater support for regulating handguns than longguns see

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<sup>3</sup>52.9% favored both measures to regulate private sales; 23.3% mandatory background check, but not liability; 8.0% no check, but liability; 11.0% neither background checks nor liability; and 4.9% some mixture with uncertainties. Altogether 87.2% favored at least one of the measures to control private sales.

<sup>4</sup>The main question asks, "Some states have passed laws limiting handgun sales to one per month per customer. Some people favor these laws as a way to prevent people from buying large quantities of handguns and selling them to criminals or teenagers. Other people oppose these laws because they say the law interferes with the right of law-abiding citizens to buy guns. Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose a law that prohibits citizens from buying more than one handgun per month?" 66.8% backs such a restriction. But of those who oppose the restriction 49.5% do so because it is too lenient. When they are included in the pro-control group, that means 80.7% oppose allowing people buy more than one handgun a month.

Smith, 1980; 1996).

People also support strengthened measures to keep weapons out of the hands of criminals. Most states currently forbid convicted felons from obtaining firearms, but do little about prohibiting those convicted of most misdemeanors from buying guns. The public favors the expansion of the felony gun restrictions to a wide range of lesser crimes. As Table 2 shows, a majority wants firearm purchases to be denied to those convicted of all seven crimes that were asked about. They believe that sales should be forbidden to those convicted of brandishing a weapon (95.4%), possessing drug paraphernalia (92.4%), illegally carrying a concealed weapon (85.4%), simple assault and battery (77.9%), shoplifting (67.5%), driving under the influence of alcohol (63.1%), and indecent exposure (61.0)%. Looking at these seven crimes together shows that 39.5% favors prohibitions for all seven, 19.0% for six of them, 26.4% for four or five, and 15.2% for three or fewer crimes.<sup>5</sup>

In brief, people want to expand the current patchwork system of regulation into a more comprehensive system of regulation analogous to what now exists for automobiles and are especially in favor of stricter controls on handguns. Likewise, they want to expand gun prohibitions to a wider range of crimes than are now typically covered by state laws.

#### **Trends in Support for Gun Control Policies**

Support for gun control has been high for many years and in some cases has grown over the last decade (Table 3 - see also Blendon, Young, and Hemenway, 1996; Danigelis and Cutler, 1991; Kleck, 1991; Smith, 1980). First, in over two dozen surveys since 1959 a majority of at least two-thirds have supported the licensing of gun purchasers (i.e. that a person must "obtain a police permit before he or she could buy a gun"). In the early and mid-1980s support averaged about 70% then grew in the late 1980s and 1990s to about 80%. In the latest 1996 survey 80% support police permits, 18% oppose them, and 2% don't know. Second, from 1977 to 1985 58-66% of registered voters supported the mandatory registration of handguns with no clear trends during these years. Support for mandatory handgun registration was higher among all adults than among registered voters (in 1985 respectively 70% and 60%). Support among all adults then rose from 70% in 1985 to over 80% in 1989-1996 and in the 1996 NGPS handgun registration was favored by 81%, 18% were opposed, and 1% didn't know. Third, about 66-70% people have apparently supported the mandatory registration of longguns

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<sup>5</sup>This scale runs from 0 for those who oppose denying guns to those convicted of any of the listed crimes to seven for those who want those convicted of all of the crimes to be denied guns.

from 1989 to 1996.<sup>6</sup> In the 1996 NGPS 66% want rifles and shotguns to be registered, 32% oppose, and 2% don't know. Fourth, similar, but not identical questions, asked from 1993 to 1996 show two-thirds in favor of laws that limit gun or handgun purchases to one-per-month per person.<sup>7</sup> Finally, only for the banning of handguns (except for the police and other authorized persons) has approval weakened over time. Support fell from 60% in 1959 to 41% in 1975 and stayed near that level since then with the 1996 NGPS showing some additional slippage with 35% for the ban, 63% opposed, and 2% unsure. In brief, for these five trends support has been strong and growing for police permits and handgun registration, strong and level for restrictions on number of monthly purchases and longgun registration, and moderate and perhaps weakening for banning the possession of handguns.

### Socio-Demographics and Gun Control

While majorities of most social groups back most measures to regulate firearms, the level of support is not uniform. As Table 4 shows, gun control is more supported by women, residents of the northeast, the widowed and separated, those with many children, Blacks and Asians, and political moderates and liberals. Age,

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<sup>6</sup>The comparison is only approximate, because the 1989 questions asked separately about rifles and shotguns and the 1996 item asked about registering both types of longguns.

<sup>7</sup>The earlier items are: Gallup (3/1993): Would you favor or oppose a law limiting the number of guns an individual can purchase to one gun per month?

Harris (5/1993): Now let me read you some suggestions that have been made on what might be done about this situation (deaths and injuries from guns). Do you favor or oppose...Limit the purchase of guns to any person to one a month?

Gallup (12/1993): Please tell me whether you would generally favor or oppose each of the following which some people have made to reduce the amount of gun violence...A limit on gun purchases to one per month?

	3/93	4/93	12/93
Favor	67%	67%	69%
Oppose	30	28	27
DK/Not Sure	3	5	4
	(1007)	(1250)	(1014)

As noted above when people who oppose these laws as too lenient are reallocated to the pro-control side, 81% in 1996 were opposed to allowing more than one handgun purchase per month. It is likely that a similar pattern prevailed in 1993.

education, and family income are unrelated to support for gun control. Prohibiting guns to criminals is more favored by women, residents of the mid-Atlantic states, the separated and widowed, those with lower incomes, the less educated, older adults, and Blacks and Asians. Number of children in the household is not related to attitudes about denying guns to criminals and political ideology has an irregular association with liberals, moderates, conservatives, and extreme conservatives showing more approval than extreme liberals and the slightly conservative.

The main differences between the socio-demographics and support for gun control and forbidding criminals from acquiring guns are 1) the former, but not the latter, has a clear association with political ideology, 2) there are no socio-economic status (SES) differences on gun control, but the lower class wants to hamper more criminals than the middle and upper classes do, 3) having children leads to more support for gun control, but is unrelated to prohibiting guns to criminals, and 4) the complex regional patterns differ somewhat.

#### Beliefs about Guns and Gun Control

People generally hold beliefs about guns that favor their regulation (Table 5). Of 10 gun belief items, a majority takes a pro-gun control or anti-gun position on six questions, a plurality does so on two more questions, and on another two an anti-gun control majority appears. In general, people believe that gun control should be used to deal with crime and gun violence. 78.3% agree that the "government should do everything it can to keep handguns out of the hands of criminals even if it means that it will be harder for law-abiding citizens to purchase handguns," 67.1% think the "government should protect people by controlling the availability of handguns," and 66.4% reject the idea that "law-abiding citizens should be able to buy whatever type of gun they want." In addition, most people are not concerned about the negative consequences of gun control measures, although the pro-gun control margin is smaller in these instances. 53.8% reject the idea that "strict handgun control laws make it more difficult for people to protect themselves and their families"<sup>8</sup> and 41.5% are not at all

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<sup>8</sup>A similar item was also rejected by a narrow margin in an earlier survey:

Gallup (12/1993): Next, I'm going to read you some things people say would occur if there were stricter laws on the buying and owning of guns. For each one, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree...Stricter laws would make it difficult for people to protect their homes and families.

Strongly agree	25%
Somewhat agree	23
Somewhat disagree	27

concerned that handgun registrations would be used by the government to "confiscate the handguns of law-abiding citizens (21.1% are very concerned and 35.9% are somewhat concerned). People also tend to reject the position that guns promote personal safety. 55.7% say that "laws allowing any adult to carry a concealed gun in public provided they pass a criminal background check and gun safety" make them feel less safe (vs. 35.2% feeling safer). By an even narrower margin people feel that a gun in the home usually makes it less safe (43.4%) rather than more safe (40.8%).<sup>9</sup> However, few people are very sanguine about the ability of handgun laws to prevent criminals from getting guns. Only 23.7% disagree that "no set of handgun control laws will do much to keep criminals from getting and using handguns."<sup>10</sup> The mix of the sentiments of people is also shown by two items on what priority the police should give to stopping illegal gun sales. On the one hand 83.1% believe that "arresting illegal gun traffickers should be one of the highest priorities of the police," but only 29.4% agree that "it is more important for the police to crack down on illegal gun sales than to crack down on illegal drug sales." This parallels the priorities that people expressed on the most important problem facing society (see below) in which drugs were mentioned 8:1 over guns.

A scale was made of these 10 gun belief items. It ranged from

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Strongly disagree	24
DK, etc.	1

(1014)

<sup>9</sup>This narrow edge to the position that guns are less safe also shows up in earlier surveys: AP/Media General (11/1986): In general, do you think having a gun in a home makes the home a safer place, a more dangerous place, or makes no difference at all?

Safer	28%
No difference	29
More dangerous	36
DK	7

(1251)

Yankelovich (2/1989): Would having a gun in your home make you feel safer from having your home broken into or robbed?

Yes, Safer	47%
No	51
DK	2

(1014)

<sup>10</sup>See also Crocker, 1983.



a minimum possible score of 11 for someone who was anti-gun control or pro-gun on all items to a possible score of 49 who took the pro-gun control/anti-gun position on each question. Scores of 10 and 50 were not possible because the two, three-category questions on concern about the confiscation of registered handguns and the impact on safety of permissive, concealed-carrying laws were recoded to run from 1.5 to 4.5 to match the five-point scales used for the other items. An eleven-point scale running from 0 to 10 that counted the number of pro-gun control/anti-gun beliefs was also created. It showed that on average people backed 5.4 pro-gun control/anti-gun beliefs. The two scales correlated .96, but the former was used in analysis because it had slightly, but consistently, higher correlations with both dependent and independent variables.

As others have noted (Stinchcombe, et al., 1980; Tyler and Lavrakas, 1983) pro-gun control/anti-gun beliefs lead to more support for gun control policies. The gun beliefs and gun control scales are correlated .68 and scales on gun beliefs and denying guns to criminals have a Pearson's  $r$  of .37. All of 10 gun belief items have positive bivariate associations with supporting more gun control measures,<sup>11</sup> but a multiple regression of the belief items and the gun control scale shows that two items on illegal gun sales and the item on strict gun laws making it harder for people to protect themselves are not independently related to support for gun control policies (Table 6A). In addition, the beliefs with lower pro-gun control marginals generally have weaker association with the policy scale than the beliefs that have large pro-gun control majorities. The regression coefficients average .084 for the least supported beliefs and .156 for the most supported beliefs. This suggests that positive beliefs about gun control do more to shape opinion about gun control policies than negative assessments do. Similarly, each gun belief item is positively related to denying guns to criminals, but three items (on the possibility of confiscation, cracking down on illegal gun sales more than illegal drug sales, and keeping handguns from criminals) are not independently related in the multivariate analysis (Table 6B).

### Trust in Government

People's trust in government has a complex relationship to their attitudes towards gun control and prohibiting criminals from acquiring guns. First, general trust in the federal government is associated with more support for gun control. The number of measures supported increases with the amount of trust that people have in the federal government: none of the time - 6.0, only some of the time - 8.3, most of the time - 8.4, and just about always -

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<sup>11</sup>Both positive and negative signs appear because of the direction in which items are framed. In each case there is more support for gun control measures when a pro-gun control or anti-gun belief is held.

9.1. Second, trust in state government has no statistically significant association with gun control and the relationship even tends to be in the opposite direction: none of the time - 7.9, only some of the - 8.4, most of the time - 8.1, and just about always - 7.1. This partial reversal is surprising since trust in federal and state government are strongly and positively related ( $r=.545$ ). Third, confidence in the local police ("I can count on the police in my community to come quickly when they are called.") is unrelated to gun control attitudes. Fourth, favoring prohibiting more criminals from being allowed to acquire firearms is not related to trust in the federal or state governments, nor to confidence in the local police. In brief, trust in government does not have a pervasive impact on support measures to regulate guns, but lower generalized trust in the federal government is related to less support for gun control policies.

### **The Most Important Problem**

Crime and drugs are among people's top concerns. 32.5% mention crime and violence as their first concern, 25.2% select drugs, and 3.9% select guns. All other problems such as the economy, foreign affairs, government corruption, poverty, the environment, etc. are mentioned by 38.4%. As Table 7 shows, support for gun control measures and denying guns to criminals is greater among those naming crime, drugs, or guns as the most important problem. For example, those mentioning other problems score 7.7 on the gun control scale, while those selecting any combination of crime, drugs, and guns favor more regulations of firearms (8.8-10.2). Not surprisingly those mentioning guns (alone or in some combination with crime and drugs) are even more supportive of restrictions than those only mentioning crime or violence. The same basic pattern also prevails for denying guns to criminals.

### **Gun Ownership and Gun Control**

As previous studies (Blendon, Young, and Hemenway, 1996; Kauder, 1993; Kleck, 1991; Kleck, 1996; McClain, 1983; Smith, 1980; Smith, 1996; Stinchcombe, 1980) have shown, attitudes towards gun control are strongly influenced by people's exposure to and ownership of guns. About 43% of households have guns and even more people have lived in households with firearms (See section below on the Pattern of Gun Ownership for details). By any measure exposure to guns is associated with less support for gun control (Table 8). For example, those who personally own a gun back 6.4 measures, those living in a household with a gun score 8.6, and those without guns favor 9.2 measures. Support is also lower if a household has both handguns and longguns (6.2) than if only a handgun or a longgun is owned (respectively 7.9 and 7.8). Additionally, among households with guns those who have guns both for hunting and crime prevention are the least supportive of gun control policies (4.9) compared to those who have guns for only one of or neither of these reasons (7.2-7.9).

Similarly, being associated with firearms leads to less support for denying guns to various types of criminals. Those personally owning a gun favor prohibitions for 4.9 crimes, those living in a household with a gun for 5.6 crimes, and those without guns for 6.1 crimes. Support is also lower among those who have ever bought a handgun (4.7 for buyers and 5.7 for non-buyers). In addition, among households with firearms those who have guns both for hunting and crime prevention are the least in favor of denying guns to criminals (4.2) compared to those who have guns for only one of or neither of these reasons (5.0-5.2).

But while gun owners are less supportive of gun control than non-owners are, even gun owners favor a majority of the gun control policies and the extension of purchase prohibitions to most of the specified crimes (Table 8; see also Hill, 1994). In addition, a majority of gun owners still back many gun control and criminal prohibition measures. For example, 80.8% of those living in households without guns favor background checks even for private sales as does 77.4% of those personally owning a gun. Similarly, 88.6% of those without guns in their homes support the mandatory registration of handguns as does 66.9% of those with handguns in their households. Likewise, 86.3% of those without guns favored denying guns to those convicted of simple assault as did 64.0% of those personally owning a gun and for shoplifters the prohibition rates were 75.1% for non-owners and 58.0% for those personally owning a gun.

### Gun Threats and Gun Control

About 20% of Americans have been threatened by a gun.<sup>12</sup> It is commonly assumed that such an experience would increase support for gun control. But common sense appears to be mistaken. On the GSS of those who have ever been threatened with a gun 64.7% endorse requiring police permits before the purchase of guns, but 76.1% of the never threatened want this licensing. Support for police permits is even less if the threats occurred both as a child and as an adult (67.1% only as child, 64.8% only as adult, and 55.0% both as child and as adult). One might suppose that the higher opposition to gun control associated with gun threats might only occur among gun owners and that the expected relationship would prevail among the "defenseless" non-gun owners. This doesn't appear to be the case however. Opposition is greater among the threatened than the never threatened who own guns (55.2% - 50.1% = 5.1 percentage points), those who don't personally own guns, but live

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<sup>12</sup>The 1996 NGPS found that 20.3% have been threatened, excluding military service. The 1994 GSS reported that 18.7% have been threatened with no explicit exclusion of military service. A 1989 Yankelovich survey indicated that threats had occurred to 15% of respondents, 7% of other family members, and 3% of both. In a 1993 Gallup survey the levels were 14% self, 13% other family members, and 3% both.

in households with guns (69.9% - 62.1% = 7.8 percentage points), and those without guns (86.8% - 78.0% = 8.8 percentage points).

In the 1996 NGPS the relationship between having been threatened with a gun and less support for gun control also appears. Moreover, the evidence is even more compelling. Since the gun threat measure excluded experiences with guns during military service, it is a cleaner measure of the impact of civilian, gun threats (e.g. criminal victimizations) and there are multiple measures of attitudes towards gun control rather than a single indicator. As on the GSS those who have been threatened by guns are less supportive of gun control than the unthreatened are (7.4 vs. 8.4) and less likely to deny guns to criminals (4.9 vs. 5.6). For gun control this pattern holds up for those owning guns (5.7 vs. 6.7) and for those with no guns in their households (8.9 vs. 9.3), but does not occur for those living in households with guns, but not personally owning one (8.6 vs. 8.6). For prohibiting criminals from buying guns, having been threatened is associated with a more lenient position among gun owners (3.9 vs. 4.9) and those living in a household with firearms (4.8 vs. 5.8), but almost vanishes among those with no guns (5.7 vs. 5.9). While gun ownership only partly specifies this relationship, gender plays an important role. Males who have been threatened are less supportive of gun control (6.6 vs. 7.5), but women who have had this experience are more for gun control (9.3 vs. 9.1). On keeping guns from criminals, threatened men are less supportive of prohibitions (4.4 vs. 5.0), but threatened and unthreatened women don't differ on prohibitions (5.93 vs. 5.96). In the section on multivariate analysis below the relationship of gun threat to the regulation of firearms is examined further.

### Pro- and Anti-Gun Control Activism

Relatively few people have actively participated in the public policy debate over firearms. In opposition to gun control 2.8% have written letters to a public official, 4.3% have joined an organization that opposes gun control, and 5.0% have given money to an anti-gun control organization. On the pro-gun control side 2.6% have written a public official, 4.6% have joined an organization, and 6.4% have given money. Altogether 92.2% of the public has taken no anti-gun control actions, 5.0% have participated in one activity, and 2.8% have done two or more actions (mean # of actions = 0.12). Similarly, 89.9% have not engaged in pro-gun control actions, 6.9% in one activity, and 3.2% in two or more actions (mean = 0.14). Thus, there is little difference in the size of the two activist camps, but the edge goes to the pro-gun control side. This is in striking contrast to what Schuman and Presser (1977-78, 1981) found in the 1970s. At that time anti-gun control activists, outnumbered pro-gun control participants by about three-to-one (respectively 20.4% to 7.1%). The greater core involvement of gun control opponents in the past also shows up on the 1984 GSS. 22.7% of opponents said they had all the information they needed on the issue, while only 9.2% of proponents were as certain in their

beliefs.

As one would expect, activists in anti-gun control activities are more opposed to the imposition of gun control measures and forbidding criminals from acquiring guns. Support for gun control falls from 8.4 for those involved in no anti-gun control actions to 6.8 for one action, 4.5 for two actions, and 1.8 for three actions. In particular, on the item asking people to select a gun control position from relaxing current restrictions to totally banning handguns, reducing gun controls are favored by 4.1% of non-activists, 14.0% of those with one activity, and 34.3% of those with 2 or more. Similarly, support for denying guns to criminals falls with anti-gun control activism from 5.5 for the non-involved to 4.8 with one activity, 3.9 with two, and 2.7 with three.

However, the opposite is not true for pro-gun control activists. Those who have engaged in pro-gun control activities do not show significantly more support for gun control than non-activists do. Support among non-activists is 8.2 and falls to 7.8 for those taking one action and 8.1 for those doing two or more actions. On the relax controls to ban handguns item, support is irregularly related to pro-gun control activism. A handgun ban is favored by 17.1% of non-activists, by only 7.2% of those with one activity, and by 20.5% of those with 2 or more activities. Likewise, support for prohibiting criminals from acquiring guns doesn't significantly vary by pro-gun control activism. It is 5.4 for non-activists, 5.4 for those doing one activity, and 5.1 for those doing two+ activities. The asymmetry comes in part from the fact that most people are for most gun control measures and thus the activists share positions held by the large non-activist majority. In effect, it means that gun control activists are not more pro-gun control than others, but are more motivated to act upon their convictions than others.

#### **Multivariate Analysis of Attitudes towards Gun Control and Denying Guns to Criminals**

Table 9A considers what variables are independent predictors of gun control attitudes controlling for other factors.<sup>13</sup> In the first model, gun beliefs are omitted from consideration. Model 1 shows that support for gun control is greater among women, those who think crime, drugs, or guns are the most important problem facing the country today, those who don't have a gun for either hunting or crime prevention, those who don't personally own a gun, those who have never lived in a household with a gun, and those who trust the federal government. In the second regression, gun beliefs are added to the model. When gun beliefs are introduced into the model, most relationships weaken and a number become statistically insignificant. This is because beliefs about firearms are a very powerful, intervening variable that explains some or all their

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<sup>13</sup>Several alternative models were examined. Each model produced highly similar results consistent to those presented in Table 9.

association with gun control attitudes. Thus, being female, saying the most important problem is crime, drugs, or guns, not having a gun for hunting, and not personally owning a gun are related to supporting gun control net of beliefs about guns. The other variables only indirectly impact on gun control through beliefs about guns. In addition, two relationships appear that were previously not statistically significant: the less educated and those who haven't been threatened with a gun are more supportive of gun control controlling for gun beliefs and other factors. Age, race, income, region of the country, marital status, number of children in the household, political ideology, type of gun, ever having bought a gun, and ever having had a disagreement about guns are not related in either model.

Table 9B shows that support for denying guns to criminals is greater among women, older adults, Blacks, the less educated, those with lower incomes, the married, those never threatened with a gun, those not personally owning a gun, and those never living in a household with a gun. With gun beliefs considered in the second model, only personal ownership is no longer significantly related to denying guns to criminals and in addition those from the South and other races (Asians, American Indians, or Hispanics) are more likely to favor denying guns to criminals.

In brief, support for firearms regulation and denying guns to criminals is mainly greater among women, those who have limited attachment to guns, those who see crime, drugs, or guns as a problem, and those with negative beliefs about guns.

### Patterns of Gun Ownership

About 43% of adults live in a household with a gun, about 25% have a handgun and 35-36% have a longgun. As Table 10 shows there has been a slow, but notable, decline in the proportion of adults living in households with guns over the last 23 years, falling from about 49% in the early 1970s.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the proportion of households with a firearm has declined from about 47% to 40% over this period. First, this has come about because a small rise in households with handguns (up from about 20% in the early 1970s) has been offset by a somewhat larger decline in households with longguns (down from about 42% in the early 1970s). The decline in gun ownership in general and longgun possession in particular reflects the changing lifestyles of Americans. Traditional rural life in general and hunting in particular have declined during recent decades. A 1959 Gallup survey found that 37.2% of households

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<sup>14</sup>The 1973-1996 GSS shows a trend with a significant linear component of -0.31 percentage points per annum (data in Table 9). A Gallup time series based on personal interviews from 1959 to 1986 has a significant linear component with a decline of 0.24 percentage points per annum. A Gallup telephone-based time series from 1988 to 1996 shows a trend with a significant linear component of -1.0 percentage points per annum (data available from NORC).

had a husband and/or wife who hunted. By the 1977 GSS this was down to 31.6% of households and the 1996 GSS shows hunters in only 23.1% of households. Second, a decline in average household size over the last several decades means that there are less potential owners per household than previously. The figures on personal ownership of guns show a steady proportion of adults personally possessing a firearm. Finally, this decline has not been countered by other trends such as a widely claimed increase in firearm ownership among women. Actually from 1980 to 1996 women have not increased their ownership of either firearms in general or handguns in particular (Smith and Smith, 1995).

People's use, exposure to, and ownership of guns of course differ from the overall household possession figures. On the one hand, having a gun in the household does not mean that it personally belongs to the respondent interviewed. 30.8% personally own a gun and another 12.9% live with, but don't personally own, a gun (56.4% having no guns in their household). On the other hand, more people have lived with guns at some point in their lives than do currently. In addition to the 42.7% who currently have guns in their households, 31.7% have lived with guns in the past, and only 25.6% have never had a gun in their household. Similarly, 26.0% currently have a gun used for hunting, 14.9% have had a hunting weapon in the past and 59.1% have either never had a gun for hunting or never had any gun. In addition, while 20.8% of adults have bought a handgun and 18.4% personally own a handgun, there is less overlap between these two figures than one might suppose. 30.1% of those who have bought a handgun don't have one currently in their home and 14.1% who never bought a handgun have one in their home.

Households with guns are about evenly split between those having both longguns and handguns and those with only one type of (Table 10). 5.3% have only handguns, 17.4% only longguns, and 20.6% both handguns and longguns (and 56.7% have neither). Households with longguns (39.0%) greatly outnumber those with handguns (25.9%).

Past studies have indicated that hunting and crime prevention are the two primary reasons for people keeping guns. The 1996 NGPS likewise found that in 61.4% of gun-owning households a gun was used for hunting<sup>15</sup> and in 40.4% of gun-owning households a firearm

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<sup>15</sup>The NGPS item on hunting is unclear on whether it refers to whether the respondent hunts with the gun or whether anyone in the household hunts with a gun ("Earlier you said you had a gun in the household. Do you use the gun for hunting?"). The GSS shows that 42.8% of households with a gun have a respondent and/or spouse who hunts, but only 26.4% have a respondent who hunts. Thus, the level of hunting use on the NGPS is much higher than indicated on the 1996 GSS even if it is assumed to refer to the household as a whole. The difference may occur because the GSS asks about whether people hunt and the NGPS question asks about what guns are used for. There may be households with "hunting guns" which no longer

was kept at least in part for protection against crime. Looking at all households shows that 8.0% have guns for hunting and crime prevention, 18.9% for just hunting, 9.4% for just crime prevention, and 7.3% for other reasons (e.g. collecting, target shooting, an unused or even non-working gun, etc.). Among households with guns this means 18.4% have the weapon for hunting and crime prevention, 43.3% for hunting alone, 21.6% only for crime prevention, and 16.7% for other reasons. The reasons for having a gun differs greatly according of the type of firearms owned. When both handguns and longguns are owned 35.6% have guns for both hunting and protection, 33.2% just for hunting, 22.3% just for protection, and 8.8% for other reasons. Among those with only handguns 2.4% cite hunting and protection, 1.4% hunting, 75.9% protection, and 20.3% other. Conversely among those only owning longguns 3.6% have them for hunting and protection, 66.4% only for hunting, 4.8% only for protection, and 25.2% for other reasons.

As Table 11 indicates, personal gun ownership is higher among men than women, is greatest in the South and West, intermediate in the Midwest and lowest in the Northeast, increases with household income, increases with age until it falls among the elderly, is higher among Whites and American Indians and lower among Blacks, Asians, and others (mostly Hispanics), is greater among the currently married than among others, and is higher among political moderates and conservatives than among liberals. It doesn't differ consistently with education or the number of children in the household. Personal ownership of a handgun largely follows this same pattern with these exceptions: the divorced are more likely to have a handgun than the married are, Midwesterners are no more likely to have a handgun than those in the Northeast, handgun ownership declines with more children in the household, and those with less than a high school education have fewer handguns.

#### **Sources of Information about Past or Potential Handgun Purchases**

Those who have bought handguns mostly relied on first-hand, inter-personal sources of information about what gun to purchase (Table 12). Friends and relatives and the gun sellers were by far the most frequently used resources (respectively by 44.7% and 42.9%) and the police were used fourth most often (14.5%). In contrast, printed information and the general mass media were consulted less frequently. Very few utilized the electronic media (television - 0.3% and radio and talk radio - 0.0%). The print media was led by magazines (16.2%) with books and newspapers (3.7%) and National Rifle Association (NRA) and gun club materials (3.6%) used less often.

Of the 16.2% who turned to magazines for information in making their most recent gun purchase 68% of them (or 10.8% of all handgun buyers) considered the advertisements in the magazines. About half of these consulted sources besides magazines, but 5.2% of all

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contain an active hunter.



handgun buyers used magazines as their only source of information and considered the ads in them as a source of information. It is not known however whether the magazines consulted were sporting and gun collecting magazines with a primary focus on firearms or general interest magazines with few gun-related articles and occasional advertisements.

Potential gun buyers report that they would rely pretty much on the same sources that past buyers have actually used. Friends and relatives and gun sellers are again the top two sources (respectively 43.3% and 52.6%) and another 8.9% mention their own personal experience with and knowledge about guns. (Police was not a coded category.) The media are cited a little more frequently among the potential buyers than they were utilized by actual buyers, but the rates and pattern of intended use are similar. Magazines are the most frequently mentioned source (21.0%). They are followed by other printed sources (NRA and gun club materials - 9.3% and books and newspapers - 5.6%) and lastly by the electronic media (television - 1.7% and radio/radio talk shows 1.7%).

#### **What Features of Guns Buyers Consider**

Those who have bought handguns mention a variety of factors that they considered when making their most recent purchase (Table 13). Most frequently mentioned are various performance or operational features starting with stopping power/caliber (23.8%), concealability/size (18.4%), easy use (12.1%), quality (11.9%), ammunition capacity (5.8%), and speed of firing (4.5%). Other factors mentioned are price (9.6%), safety (9.4%), appearance (7.7%), brand name (5.3%), convenience of the store (0.6%), and other (28.7%). Among potential buyers there are two notable differences in what features would be considered. First, concealability/size is the most frequently selected and are mentioned almost twice as often (35.8% vs. 18.4%). Second, safety features are mentioned next most frequently and are cited by more than twice as many potential buyers as past purchasers (24.5% vs. 9.4%). This suggests that potential buyers have concerns about the safety of firearms in their homes and put an extra premium on safety features.

#### **Reasons for Not Having Guns**

Two groups were asked why they didn't have guns. The first are those who have never lived in a household with a gun. The second are those who 1) "ever lived in a home in which you or someone else kept a gun" and now report no guns in the household and 2) never bought a handgun. Among those never having lived with a gun most mention negative aspects of guns as reasons for not having a weapon (anti-gun - 26.4%, feel guns are more of a threat than a help - 19.8%, children in the house - 13.7%, raised not to own guns - 1.9%, know someone hurt with a gun - 1.4%, afraid of suicide attempts (1.0%), and opposition by spouse or girl/boyfriend (0.1%) (Table 14). Another large number mention not having specific

reasons for acquiring a firearm (38.1% - never felt the need for a gun and 1.4% - doesn't hunt, etc.). Expense was mentioned as a factor by very few (0.9%).

Among those who used to live in a household with a gun, but do not now and haven't ever bought a handgun, most (56.6%) mention this was simply because of changes in household composition. In many cases, this probably just amounted to growing up and leaving the parental home. Negative aspects of guns are mentioned next most frequently (children in the household - 7.0%, raised not to own guns - 6.8%, anti-gun - 5.9%, spouse or boy/girlfriend against guns - 1.5%, know someone hurt with gun - 1.4%, suicide concerns - 0.1%). Then, came not having any particular reason for getting a gun (Never felt the need for a gun - 9.5% and don't hunt, etc. 1.5%). Few (0.5%) mentioned expense as a reason for not getting a gun.

### **Gender and Disputes over Guns**

As indicated in previous sections, gender is one of the key factors that delineates people on their attitudes towards guns and gun control. Women are less supportive of violence and force in general and of guns in particular (Smith, 1985; Wirls, 1986; Finlay and Love, 1988). Women are less likely to own guns and more likely to support measures to control guns (Tables 4 and 11).

In addition, when disputes arise within households over the presence of guns, women are overwhelmingly more opposed to having firearms in the home than men are. 16.1% report having had a disagreement about guns in their homes. Of these disagreement 82.0% involved an argument between a man and a woman. In these "battle of the sexes" over firearms, the woman was against having the gun in 64.1% of the disagreements, wanted greater safety precautions (having the gun locked up, unloaded, or inaccessible to children) taken 19.6% of the time, had some other miscellaneous point of view 7.8% of the time, and only favored having a gun in 6.2% of the disputes.<sup>16</sup>

Disputes do not vary by whether a gun is presently in the household or whether the respondent has ever bought a handgun, but are more common in households that only have a pistol. In 31.6% of households that have handguns, but no longguns, there have been disagreements (vs. only 10.6% in households with both types of weapons, 16.8% in household with only longguns, and 16.6% in households without any guns). In these households with only handguns, women were 10 to 1 more likely to argue against the gun than for it (23.7% vs. 2.3%). It appears that these disagreements lead to a reduction in the number of households with guns. Among people who were not raised with guns and don't have one now, 10.0% have had arguments over firearms. Among those raised with guns who

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<sup>16</sup>These are the joint reports of men and women. When examined separately, men and women show no differences in their characterizations of disagreements over guns.

still have guns in their households 15.8% have had disputes. But among those raised with guns who now do not have guns, 21.7% have had disputes. In these households, women argued against guns 10:1 (16.8% against vs. 1.7% for).

### **Handgun Buyers and Childproof and Personalized Guns**

The introduction of childproof and personalized handguns onto the firearms market may have a major impact on the pattern of handgun purchases.<sup>17</sup> Those who do not have a gun in their household or who have a gun, but have never bought a handgun (i.e. those without "gun exposure") were asked how "likely do you think it is that you will ever buy a handgun." 8.5% said very likely, 13.2% likely, 0.9% neither likely nor unlikely, 16.1% unlikely, and 61.1% very unlikely. However, while only 21.7% said that they were likely to buy a future handgun, 33.4% said they would consider "buying a childproof handgun." This indicates that childproof guns might increase handgun purchases among this group by 54%. Getting a childproof handgun was considered by 74.9% of those who had said it was likely or very likely that they would ever buy a handgun. In addition, even 21.5% of those who had said it was unlikely or very unlikely that they would ever buy a handgun would consider a childproof gun. If the childproofing added nothing to the gun's cost, 16.5% of those otherwise unlikely to ever buy a handgun said they were very likely to get such a gun and even if the childproof gun cost \$20 more, 14.8% said they were very likely to purchase such a weapon. Among those who have a gun in their household and who have bought a handgun before, 46.9% would consider buying a childproof handgun in the future and virtually all of them indicate that such a purchase would be likely or very likely. (It is unknown how many would not consider a childproof handgun because of a lack of interest in any additional guns.) Thus, a childproof handgun would apparently both steer some of those likely to buy a handgun from standard firearms to a safer, childproof model and also expand the market for handguns by overcoming the child-safety concerns that deter some people from considering buying a handgun.

Among those who don't have a gun in their household or who have a gun, but have never bought a handgun, 32.5% would consider buying "a handgun that would only fire for the owner of the gun." Purchasing a personalized handgun is considered a possibility by 63.4% of those who said a future purchase was likely or very likely and even by 16.6% of those who said it was unlikely or very unlikely that they would ever buy a handgun. In addition, among those with a gun in their household and who have previously purchased a handgun, 46.7% would consider buying a personalized

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<sup>17</sup>Childproof guns were described in a question as "handguns...made so they cannot be fired by a young child's small hands" and personalized guns as "handguns equipped with devices which can recognize the owner of a gun and not fire for anyone else."

handgun.

Favorable consideration of a personalized handgun declines when the probable extra cost of such weapons is mentioned. Among those without gun exposure 79.4% rated a purchase as likely or very likely if personalization added \$100 to the handgun's cost and 58.7% as likely or very likely if costs increased by \$300. Of those who said a future handgun purchase was likely or very likely 52.0% rated their likelihood of buying a personalized handgun as likely or very likely if it added \$100 in costs and 38.6% as likely or very likely to buy if costs increased by \$300. Among those without gun exposure who said it was unlikely or very unlikely that they would ever buy a handgun, 18.1% said that a purchase of a personalized handgun was likely or very likely if it cost \$100 more and 13.1% if it cost an additional \$300. Overall, of those who say they would be unlikely or very unlikely to pay \$100 more for a personalized gun, 65.5% cite price as the reason for this decision.

Thus, the availability of personalized handguns on the market would apparently both switch some of those likely to buy a handgun from a standard firearm to a safer, personalized model and expand the market for handguns, by overcoming the safety concerns that deter some people from considering buying a handgun. How much substitution would occur clearly depends on cost, but even with increases of from \$100 to \$300 a substantial number of people would probably choose personalized handguns over standard models. Of course, these are estimates based on anticipated future behavior and future behaviors may not follow present expectations.

### Conclusion

In response to the high level of gun violence in America, the public supports a wide range of gun control measures to regulate firearms like automobiles and driving are regulated. Majorities favor such measures as registering all guns, requiring that all new handguns be childproofed, regulating the safety design of guns, training and licensing handgun owners, and various other policies to make guns safer and less easily available. The public does not, however, favor the banning of guns. Likewise, the public backs measures to deny guns to criminals by prohibiting those convicted of a wide range of misdemeanors from purchasing guns.

Consistent with their support for measures to regulate firearms, large majorities believe that the government should vigorously pursue illegal gun traffickers (83%), "do everything it can to keep handguns out of the hands of criminals even if it means that it will be harder for law-abiding citizens to purchase handguns" (78%), protect people by controlling the availability of guns (67%), and keep people from being able to buy "whatever type of gun they want" (66%). In addition, permissive concealed carrying laws are seen as decreasing safety and the public is about evenly split on whether a gun makes a home safer (43% no vs. 41% yes). But the public also thinks that stopping criminals from getting firearms will be difficult with only 23% believing that gun control will do much to keep handguns from criminals.

About 43% of adults live in a household with a gun. About 35-36% live in a household with a rifle or shotgun and 24% with a handgun. Households with longguns have been slowly declining over time from about 42% in the early 1970s, while the handguns have increased from 20% of households in the early 1970s. Since longguns are overwhelmingly used for hunting and handguns mostly for crime prevention, this indicates that self-defense rather than sport is increasingly becoming the reason for people to have guns.

While gun owners are less supportive of gun controls than those without firearms, they nevertheless back a wide range of measures to regulate firearms. For example, 89% of those without guns in their homes support the mandatory registration of handguns as does 67% of those owning handguns.

The public is highly receptive to technological innovations such as childproofing and personalizing firearms that would make guns safer and/or less useful to criminals. First, the public backs laws requiring that all new handguns be childproofed (86%) and personalized (68%) and endorses government regulation of the safety design of guns (75%). Second, future handgun purchasers expressed a great deal of interest in these safety-enhanced weapons. Of those likely to ever buy a handgun, 75% would consider buying a childproof weapon and 63% purchasing a personalized weapon.

Table 1

Support for Gun Control Measures

Requiring that all new handguns be childproof	85.8%
Mandatory registration of handguns	81.3
Limit handguns sales to one or less per month	80.7
Background check required for private sales of guns	77.4
Government regulate safety design of guns	74.6
Licenses to sell guns only for stores	70.3
Handgun owners must at least be licensed and trained <sup>a</sup>	69.8
Requiring that all new handguns be personalized	68.0
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	66.3
Private gun seller liable if no background check	61.3
Concealed carrying only for those with special needs	53.5
High taxes for gun dealers	48.5
Ban possession of handguns, except police/authorized	35.2
Total ban on handguns	16.1

N=1200

<sup>a</sup>16.1% wanted a "total ban on handgun ownership" and 53.7% said that "handgun owners should be licensed by the government and complete mandatory training." 69.8% favored licensing at the minimum.

Question wordings: Which of these views comes closer to your own? Legal restrictions on the sale and ownership of handguns are too strict and should be relaxed/Existing restrictions on the sale and ownership of handguns are sufficient now/Handgun owners should be licensed by the government and complete mandatory training/There should be a total ban on handgun ownership.

I am going to ask you about how much you favor or oppose a number of policies concerning making, selling, and carrying guns. Please tell me whether you favor or oppose the following policies.

Do you favor or oppose the mandatory registration of handguns and pistols?

Do you favor or oppose the mandatory registration of rifles and shotguns?

Do you think there should be a law that would ban the possession of handguns except for the police and other authorized persons?

Most states require a special license to allow people to carry a concealed firearm. Should licenses to carry concealed firearms be issued to any adult who has passed a criminal background check and a gun safety course or only to people with a special need to carry a concealed gun such as private detectives?

Table 1 (continued)

In most states, a gun owner may legally sell his or her gun without proof that the buyer had passed a criminal history check. How strongly do you favor or oppose a law that required private gun sales to be subject to the same background check requirements as sales by licensed dealers? Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose?

In some states, a gun owner may not legally sell his or her gun without proof that the buyer has passed a criminal history check. Should someone who sells a gun in violation of this law share legal responsibility for crimes committed by the buyer of the gun -- would you say you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree?

Some states have passed laws limiting handgun sales to one per month per customer. Some people favor these laws as away to prevent people from buying large quantities of handguns and selling them to criminals or teenagers. Other people oppose these laws because they say the law interferes with the right of law-abiding citizens to buy guns. Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose a law that prohibits citizens from buying more than one handgun per month? IF OPPOSE: Is that because such laws unnecessarily restrict gun sales or because they are not restrictive enough?

Some gun collectors and individuals who want to sell guns out of their homes obtain gun dealer licenses. Some people think that gun dealer licenses should only be granted to people who run gun stores so that sales can be more easily monitored. Others feel that limiting licenses in this way would make it too hard for some people to buy a gun. How strongly would you favor or oppose restricting gun dealer licenses to gun stores? Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose?

The fee for acquiring a federal license for firearms dealers is \$200 for the first three years and \$90 for a three year renewal. Some people argue that the fee should be doubled in order to decrease the number of people who get licenses to sell guns. Others think that gun dealers are already taxed enough. How strongly would you favor or oppose doubling gun licensing fees? Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose?

Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose government safety regulations for the design of guns? Handguns can be made so that they cannot be fired by a young child's small hands. How strongly would you favor or oppose legislation requiring all new handguns sold in the US to be childproof?

Engineers are now designing handguns equipped with devices which can recognize the owner of a gun and not fire for anyone else. For

Table 1 (continued)

example, these personalized guns may have a mechanism that prevents the gun from firing unless it comes in contact with a special ring that the shooter must wear. The technology is intended to protect a gun owner if an attacker tries to take his gun away and to make the gun less useful to criminals if it is stolen. Personalized guns are also designed to reduce the risk of a child or teenager shooting themselves or someone else. But personalized guns will cost more than other guns and the chances that the gun will not fire when you want it to may be increased slightly. If a new law were to require all new handguns to be personalized, how strongly would you favor or oppose it? Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose?

Source: 1996 NGPS



Table 2

% for Prohibiting Gun Purchases to Criminals

Convicted of...

Publicly displaying a firearm in a threatening manner	95.4
Possession of equipment for illegal drug use	92.4
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	85.4
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or a serious injury	77.9
Shoplifting	67.5
Driving under the influence of alcohol	63.1
Indecent exposure	61.0

N=1200

Question Wording: Now I would like to read you a list of crimes. In most states persons who have been convicted of these crimes can legally purchase firearms. In each case, tell me if you think persons who have been convicted of the crime should or should not be able to purchase firearms.

Source: 1996 NGPS

Table 3

## Trends on Gun Control

Do you favor or oppose mandatory registration of handguns or pistols? (Yankelovich/Gallup/NORC)

	3/77	3/80	3/80	8/80	5/81
Favor	66	61	63	58	61
Oppose	30	36	34	37	37
DK	4	4	3	4	3
	(1004)	(1221)	(917)	(1644)	(1221)
	9/81	4/82	4/85	7/85	2/89
Favor	60	66	70	60	84
Oppose	36	30	25	36	14
DK	4	4	5	5	2
	(1222)	(1543)	(1525)	(1013)	(1014)
	9/90	3/91	12/93	10/96	
Favor	81	80	81	81	
Oppose	17	17	18	18	
DK	2	2	1	1	
	(1031)	(1010)	(1014)	(1200)	

Yankelovich 1977-1981, 7/1985, 2/1989: 3/77 to 7/85 are registered voters and reads "all handguns" instead of "handguns and pistols." Gallup, 4/1982, 4/1985, 9/1990, 3/1991, 12/1993: "Would you favor or oppose the registration of all handguns?" NORC, 1996: "Do you favor or oppose mandatory registration of handguns and pistols?"

Table 3 (continued)

Would you favor or oppose a law which would require a person to obtain a police permit before he or she could buy a gun? (Gallup 1959-5/72; General Social Survey 3/1972-1996)

	7/59	12/63	1/65	8/66	8/67
Favor	75	79	73	67	73
Oppose	21	17	23	29	24
DK	4	4	4	3	4
	(1538)	(1613)	(2435)	(1509)	(1627)
	10/71	3/72	5/72	3/73	3/74
Favor	71	70	71	74	75
Oppose	24	27	25	25	23
DK	4	3	4	2	1
	(1526)	(1610)	(1541)	(1495)	(1476)
	3/75	3/76	3/77	3/80	3/82
Favor	73	72	71	69	72
Oppose	25	27	28	29	26
DK	2	1	2	2	2
	(1488)	(1494)	(1529)	(1468)	(1504)
	3/84	3/85	3/87	3/88	3/89
Favor	71	72	69	74	78
Oppose	27	27	29	24	20
DK	2	1	2	3	1
	(1467)	(1530)	(1464)	( 978)	(1035)
	3/90	3/91	3/93	3/94	3/96
Favor	79	81	81	78	80
Oppose	19	18	18	21	18
DK	2	1	2	1	2
	( 906)	( 992)	(1064)	(2017)	(1919)

Table 3 (continued)

Gallup (3/1993): Would you favor or oppose a law limiting the number of guns an individual can purchase to one gun per month?

Harris (5/1993): Now let me read you some suggestions that have been made on what might be done about this situation (deaths and injuries from guns). Do you favor or oppose...Limit the purchase of guns to any person to one a month?

Gallup (12/1993): Please tell me whether you would generally favor or oppose each of the following which some people have made to reduce the amount of gun violence...A limit on gun purchases to one per month?

	3/93	4/93	12/93
Favor	67%	67%	69%
Oppose	30	28	27
DK/Not Sure	3	5	4
	(1007)	(1250)	(1014)

Table 4

## Socio-Demographics and Support for Gun Control

	Gun Control Scale	Crimes Scale
Men	7.2	4.9
Women	9.1	5.9
Prob.	.000	.000
New England	8.9	5.1
Mid-Atlantic	8.9	5.9
East North Central	8.5	5.6
West North Central	7.7	5.1
South Atlantic	8.0	5.6
East South Central	7.6	5.2
West South Central	8.2	5.5
Mountain	7.8	5.1
Pacific	7.8	5.0
Prob.	.001	.000
Married	8.0	5.3
Divorced	8.3	5.5
Separated	9.6	6.0
Widowed	8.8	6.5
Never Married	8.3	5.2
Prob.	.036	.000
\$0-9,999	8.9	6.3
\$10,000-19,999	8.4	6.0
\$20,000-29,999	8.2	5.5
\$30,000-39,999	8.4	5.4
\$40,000-49,999	8.1	5.1
\$50,000-59,999	8.1	5.0
\$60,000-74,999	8.4	5.2
\$75,000+	7.9	4.8
Prob.	.408	.000
Less than High School	8.3	5.9
High School	8.0	5.4
College	8.2	5.3
Greater than College	8.7	5.0
Prob.	.122	.000

Table 4 (continued)

	Gun Control Scale	Crimes Scale
Less than 30	8.3	5.2
30-39	8.4	5.2
40-49	8.1	5.2
50-64	7.7	5.6
65+	8.4	6.2
Prob.	.069	.000
No Children in House	8.0	5.5
1	8.5	5.5
2	8.1	5.3
3	8.6	5.3
4	8.7	5.4
5+	9.9	6.4
Prob.	.035	.201
White	8.1	5.3
Black	9.0	6.0
Asian	10.1	6.3
American Indian	7.2	4.8
Other	8.1	5.2
Prob.	.004	.000
Extremely Liberal	7.8	4.7
Liberal	8.5	5.7
Slightly Liberal	8.6	5.4
Moderate	8.8	5.5
Slightly Conservative	7.8	5.0
Conservative	7.5	5.5
Extremely Conservative	7.7	5.5
Prob.	.000	.003

Source: 1996 NGPS

Table 5

## Beliefs about Guns and Gun Control

	anti-gun/ pro-gun control	pro-gun/ anti-gun control <sup>a</sup>
Arresting illegal gun traffickers should be one of the highest priorities of the police	83.1	14.8
Government should do everything it can to keep handguns out of the hands of criminals even if it means that it will be harder for law-abiding citizens to purchase handguns	78.3	18.8
Government should protect people by controlling availability of handguns	67.1	29.4
Law-abiding citizens should be able to buy whatever type of gun they want	66.4	32.3
Permissive concealed carrying laws make you feel less safe	55.7	35.2
Strict handgun control laws make it more difficult for people to protect themselves and their families	53.8	41.2
A gun usually makes a home less safe	43.4	40.8
Concerned that if people were required to register their handguns, the government would use the information to try to confiscate the handguns of law-abiding citizens	41.5	21.1
It is more important for the police to crack down on illegal gun sales than to crack down on illegal drug sales	29.4	52.7
No handgun laws will do much to keep handguns from criminals	23.7	73.1

N=1200

<sup>a</sup>Neutral and don't know responses are not shown.

Source: 1996 NGPS

Table 6

Beliefs about Guns/Gun Control and  
Support for Gun Control Policies and Denying Guns to Criminals

	Pearson's $r^a$	Regression Coefficients/ Probability
A. Gun Control Policies		
Arresting illegal gun traffickers should be one of the highest priorities of the police (Disagree) <sup>b</sup>	-.165	-.026/.255
Government should do everything it can to keep handguns out of the hands of criminals even if it means that it will be harder for law-abiding citizens to purchase handguns (Disagree)	-.463	-.195/.000
Government should protect people by controlling availability of handguns (Disagree)	-.522	-.225/.000
Law-abiding citizens should be able to buy whatever type of gun they want (Disagree)	.463	.218/.000
Permissive concealed carrying laws make you feel less safe (Less Safe)	.395	.117/.000
Strict handgun control laws make it more difficult for people to protect themselves and their families (Disagree)	.302	.047/.054
A gun usually makes a home less safe (Less Safe)	.458	.145/.000
Concerned that if people were required to register their handguns, the government would use the information to try to confiscate the handguns of law-abiding citizens (Not at All Concerned)	.305	.056/.021
It is more important for the police to crack down on illegal gun sales than to crack down on illegal drug sales (Disagree)	-.219	-.141/.000
No handgun laws will do much to keep handguns from criminals (Disagree)	.186	.029/.205
		$r^2 = .49$

N=1113 (for multiple regression)

<sup>a</sup>All Pearson  $r$ 's are statistically significant at the .000 level.

<sup>b</sup>High category indicated in parentheses.

Source: 1996 NGPS



Table 6 (continued)

	Pearson's $r^c$	Regression Coefficients/ Probability
B. Denying Guns to Criminals		
Arresting illegal gun traffickers should be one of the highest priorities of the police	-.144	-.063/.026
Government should do everything it can to keep handguns out of the hands of criminals even if it means that it will be harder for law-abiding citizens to purchase handguns	-.249	-.120/.000
Government should protect people by controlling availability of handguns	-.243	-.071/.033
Law-abiding citizens should be able to buy whatever type of gun they want	.347	.249/.000
Permissive concealed carrying laws make you feel less safe	.244	.080/.011
Strict handgun control laws make it more difficult for people to protect themselves and their families	.066	-.083/.007
A gun usually makes a home less safe	.252	.084/.013
Concerned that if people were required to register their handguns, the government would use the information to try to confiscate the handguns of law-abiding citizens	.077	-.040/.185
It is more important for the police to crack down on illegal gun sales than to crack down on illegal drug sales	-.112	-.028/.322
No handgun laws will do much to keep handguns from criminals	.120	.043/.125
		$r^2 = .18$

N=1148 (for multiple regression)

\*Pearson  $r$ 's statistically significant at .001 level except for "Concern that if people..." prob.=.008 and "Strict handgun control..." prob.=.023.

Table 7

Support for Gun Control and Denying Guns to Criminals by  
the Importance of Problems

	Gun Control (Mean)	Gun Denying Crimes (Mean)
No mention of Crime, Drugs, or Guns	7.7	5.2 (549)
Crime Only	8.5	5.6 (304)
Drugs Only	8.7	5.6 (216)
Guns Only	9.6	5.9 ( 31)
Crime and Drugs	8.8	5.9 ( 84)
Crime and Guns	8.8	6.1 ( 10)
Drugs and Guns	10.2	6.1 ( 5)

Source: 1996 NGPS

Table 8

Support for Gun Control and Denying Guns to Criminals by  
the Ownership of Guns

	Gun Control (Mean)	Gun Denying Crimes (Mean)
Have Gun in Household	7.0	4.9
No Gun	9.2	5.8
Prob.	.000	.000
Gun Owned by Respondent	6.4	4.6
Gun Owned by Other	8.6	5.7
No Gun	9.2	5.8
Prob.	.000	.000
Now Has Gun in Household	7.0	4.9
Lived in Household with Gun	8.8	5.6
Never Lived in Household with Gun	9.5	6.1
Prob.	.000	.000
Handguns and Longguns	6.2	4.7
Only Handguns	7.9	5.7
Only Longguns	7.8	5.0
No Guns	9.2	5.8
Prob.	.000	.000
Ever Bought Handgun	6.4	4.7
Never Bought Handgun	8.7	5.7
Prob.	.000	.000

Source: 1996 NGPS

Table 9

Multivariate Analysis of Support for Gun Control  
And Denying Guns to Criminals

## A. Gun Control

Variables (High Value)	Regression Coefficient/Prob.	
	Model1	Model2
Gender (Female)	.162/.000	.079/.008
Age (Older)	.054/.098	.009/.741
Race - White Omitted		
Black	.022/.458	-.015/.559
Other	.003/.910	.024/.306
Education (Higher)	.027/.375	-.070/.007
Income (Higher)	.013/.669	-.029/.253
Region - Northeast Omitted		
Midwest	-.032/.302	.014/.603
South	-.028/.378	.031/.250
West	.003/.920	-.006/.814
Marital Status (Married)	.040/.222	.011/.672
Child in Household (More)	.044/.179	.044/.108
Political Ideology (Conservative)	-.026/.357	.041/.089
Imp. Problem (Crime/Drugs/Guns)	.097/.001	.065/.009
Threatened with Guns (Yes)	-.050/.101	-.059/.021
Have Gun for Hunting (Yes)	-.190/.000	-.111/.001
Have Gun to Prevent Crime (Yes)	-.090/.018	.048/.142
Personally Own Gun (Yes)	-.153/.005	-.104/.023
Ever in Household with Gun (Yes)	-.093/.005	-.034/.214
Type of Gun - No Gun Omitted		
Handgun & Longgun	-.045/.441	.021/.669
One Type Only	.060/.218	.057/.168
Ever Buy Handgun (Yes)	-.045/.226	.037/.236
Disagreement Over Guns (Yes)	.015/.603	-.017/.478
Trust Federal Govt (None of Time)	-.065/.025	-.037/.127
Gun Belief Scale (Pro-Control)	-----	.624/.000
$r^2$	.301	.527
	(928)	(892)

Table 9 (continued)

## B. Denying Guns to Criminals

Variables (High Value)	Regression Coefficient/Prob.	
	Model1	Model2
Gender (Female)	.183/.000	.140/.000
Age (Older)	.204/.000	.192/.000
Race - White Omitted		
Black	.128/.000	.118/.000
Other	.052/.076	.063/.031
Education (Higher)	-.120/.000	-.154/.000
Income (Higher)	-.073/.019	-.089/.004
Region - Northeast Omitted		
Midwest	-.011/.747	.008/.805
South	.039/.239	.072/.027
West	-.031/.308	-.034/.258
Marital Status (Married)	.078/.020	.057/.092
Child in Household (More)	-.004/.894	.009/.795
Political Ideology (Conservative)	.006/.845	.034/.257
Imp. Problem (Crime/Drugs/Guns)	.050/.099	.044/.141
Threatened with Guns (Yes)	-.100/.002	-.093/.003
Have Gun for Hunting (Yes)	-.050/.232	.005/.901
Have Gun to Prevent Crime (Yes)	-.045/.249	.021/.604
Personally Own Gun (Yes)	-.116/.039	-.106/.058
Ever in Household with Gun (Yes)	-.100/.004	-.082/.016
Type of Gun - No Gun Omitted		
Handgun & Longgun	-.038/.535	.006/.924
One Type Only	.020/.686	.021/.683
Ever Buy Handgun (Yes)	-.011/.780	.041/.282
Disagreement Over Guns (Yes)	.010/.745	-.003/.920
Trust Federal Govt (None of Time)	-.001/.984	.021/.481
Gun Belief Scale (Pro-Control)	-----	.303/.000
$r^2$	.242	.287
	(928)	(892)

Table 10  
The Ownership of Guns

A. Trends in Gun Ownership - Overall

	% of Adults in Households with Guns	% of House- holds with Guns	% of Adults Per- sonally with Gun
1973	49.1	47.3	-----
1974	47.9	46.2	-----
1976	49.7	46.7	-----
1977	54.0	50.7	-----
1980	50.8	47.7	29.0
1982	48.9	45.5	29.1
1984	48.5	45.2	25.5
1985	48.1	44.3	30.7
1987	48.6	46.1	28.2
1988	43.4	40.1	25.2
1989	48.9	46.1	27.4
1990	45.8	42.7	28.7
1991	43.7	39.9	27.6
1993	45.5	42.1	29.4
1994	43.9	40.2	28.5
1996a	43.4	40.7	27.2
1996b	42.3	39.1	30.8

Source: GSS, 1973-1996a, NGPS, 1996b

B. Trends in Gun Ownership - Type of Firearm

	% of Adults in House- hold with Handguns	% of Adults in Household with Longguns
1973	20.3	42.1%
1974	20.3	40.4%
1976	22.2	41.7
1977	21.3	45.8
1980	24.3	42.8
1982	22.4	41.5
1984	22.4	41.3
1985	24.2	39.5
1987	26.5	41.9
1988	24.4	35.9
1989	26.8	40.0
1990	24.9	37.3
1991	22.1	37.0
1993	26.1	36.7
1994	26.2	35.4
1996a	23.7	34.8
1996b	24.8	36.9

Source: GSS, 1973-1996a, NGPS, 1996b

Table 10 (continued)

C. Current Pattern of Gun Ownership

No Guns in Household	56.7%
Handgun Only	5.3
Longgun Only	17.4
Both Types of Guns	20.6

(1150)

Bought Handgun	20.8%
Never Bought Handgun	77.7
Refused, etc.	1.5

(1200)

Respondent Owns Gun	30.8%
Other Person Owns Gun	12.9
No Gun in Household	56.4

(1157)

Respondent Owns Handgun	18.4%
Doesn't Own Gun	78.3
Refused, Missing	3.4

(1200)

Gun in Current Household	42.7%
Gun in Past Household	31.7
No Guns, Now or Past	25.6

(1188)

Source: 1996 NGPS

Table 11

## Socio-Demographics of Personal Gun Ownership

	% Personally Owning Gun	% Personally Owning Handgun
Men	55.2	32.7
Women	8.6	6.5
New England	22.0	8.4
Mid-Atlantic	17.8	13.0
East North Central	29.1	14.1
West North Central	30.6	9.7
South Atlantic	34.3	26.2
East South Central	36.6	23.3
West South Central	41.3	26.0
Mountain	32.1	22.1
Pacific	34.4	21.6
Married	38.3	24.0
Divorced	33.8	28.9
Separated	9.2	9.2
Widowed	18.7	13.6
Never Married	18.5	5.9
\$0-9,999	19.3	7.0
\$10,000-19,999	22.4	10.2
\$20,000-29,999	39.6	29.2
\$30,000-39,999	28.9	16.7
\$40,000-49,999	37.6	25.2
\$50,000-59,999	32.3	18.5
\$60,000-74,999	29.7	20.3
\$75,000+	45.5	29.6
Less than High School	28.4	11.5
High School	35.2	24.9
College	29.9	18.8
Greater than College	27.9	19.1
Less than 30	18.3	9.5
30-39	30.8	15.7
40-49	37.0	26.0
50-64	41.8	28.8
65+	30.8	19.4
No Children in House	32.7	21.9
1	25.0	15.3
2	33.2	19.3
3	32.7	13.6
4	24.3	8.9
5+	0.0	0.0



Table 11 (continued)

	% Personally Owning Gun	% Personally Owning Handgun
White	33.5	20.4
Black	15.5	12.2
Asian	12.0	12.0
American Indian	28.3	10.4
Other	23.0	13.7
Extremely Liberal	13.1	11.5
Liberal	18.8	10.8
Slightly Liberal	24.3	11.8
Moderate	35.1	22.7
Slightly Conservative	36.3	19.9
Conservative	34.2	22.3
Extremely Conservative	30.6	24.0

Source: 1996 NGPS

Table 12

## Sources of Information about What Gun to Buy

	Last Purchase	Possible Purchase
Friends/relatives	44.7	43.3
Gun store or other gun seller	42.9	52.6
Magazines	16.2	21.0
Police	14.5	----
Books/newspaper articles	3.7	5.6
NRA/gun club materials	3.6	9.3
Television	0.3	1.7
Radio/talk radio	0.0	1.7
Self-experience	----	8.9
Other	14.2	7.9
	(246)	(234)

Question wordings: Before you bought your last gun, where did you turn for information to help you decide what gun to buy? (Asked of people who ever bought a handgun.)

If you were considering buying a gun, where would you most likely turn for information to help you decide what (gun) to buy? (Asked of people who said it would be very likely, likely, or neither likely nor unlikely that they would ever buy a handgun.)

Percentages add to more than 100% due to multiple mentions.

Source: 1996 NGPS

Table 13

Factors about Guns that Influenced/Would Influence  
Purchase of Handgun

	Last Purchase	Possible Purchase
Stopping power/caliber	23.8%	18.6%
Concealability/Size	18.4	35.8
Easy use	12.1	----
Quality	11.9	16.5
Price	9.6	8.5
Safety features	9.4	24.5
Appearance	7.7	3.6
Ammunition capacity	5.8	6.5
Brand name	5.3	3.7
Speed of firing	4.5	8.2
Convenience of store	0.6	0.0
Non-gun related matters	----	3.7
Other	28.7	37.2
	(245)	(222)

Question wordings: What factors about the gun itself were most important in your decision to buy the handgun model that you last bought? (Asked of people who ever bought a handgun.)

If you do eventually shop for a gun, what characteristics of the gun itself would be most important in your decision to buy a particular model? (Asked of people who said it would be very likely, likely, or neither likely nor unlikely that they would ever buy a handgun.)

Percentages add to more than 100% due to multiple mentions.

Source: 1996 NGPS

Table 14

## Reasons for Not Having Guns

	Why Don't Own Gun	Why No Longer in Household with Gun
Moved out of gun's owners house or gun owner moved out of house	----	56.6
Never felt the need for a gun	38.1	9.5
Against guns/ethical reasons	26.4	5.9
Felt it's more of a threat than a help	19.8	7.0
Have children in the house	13.7	6.8
Raised not to own guns	1.9	0.0
Know someone who was hurt/killed with a gun	1.4	1.4
Do not participate in gun-type sports/hunting	1.4	1.5
Afraid of suicide with a gun	1.0	0.1
Too expensive	0.9	0.5
Spouse or girl/boyfriend against getting one	0.1	1.5
Other	28.5	24.1
Unsure/refused	0.8	1.9
	(306)	(360)

Question Wordings: Why do you not own a gun? (Asked of people who never lived in a household with a gun.)

Why do you no longer live in a household with a gun? (Asked of people who "ever lived in a home in which you or someone else kept a gun" and who now report no guns in the household and who never bought a handgun.)

Percentages add to more than 100% due multiple mentions

Source: 1996 NGPS

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