

**1998 National Gun Policy Survey
of the National Opinion Research Center:
Research Findings**

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INTRODUCTION

Gun violence exacts a staggering toll on American society. Consider the following:

- ▶ The rate of gun deaths from homicides and suicides is much higher in the United States than in any other developed country in the world (Krug, Powell, and Dahlberg, 1998; Killias, 1993a and 1993b).
- ▶ The disparity is particularly great in regard to children. The rate of firearm deaths to children 14 and under is 12-times greater in the United States than the average of 25 other high-income countries (Div. of Violence Prevention, 1997).
- ▶ From 1994 to 1996, 34,000-39,000 deaths and over 100,000 non-fatal injuries per annum have been caused by firearms (Singh, Kochanek, and MacDorman, 1996; Zawitz, 1996; National Center for Health Statistics, 1998).
- ▶ In recent years gunshots have been the second leading cause of death for people aged 10-24 years and the third leading cause of death for persons aged 25-34 years (National Center, 1996; "Current Trends," 1994).
- ▶ Over 70% of murders are committed with a firearm (National Center, 1996).

To explore public opinion on measures dealing with the gun violence problem, this report examines:

- ▶ The public's views on the regulation of firearms, including attitudes toward a) general gun control measures, b) measures aimed at promoting gun safety, c) guns and criminals, d) willingness to pay for specific anti-gun violence programs, e) parallels between regulation of tobacco and firearms, f) imports and firearms, g) the Second Amendment, h) gun-carrying laws, and i) how attitudes have changed over time;
- ▶ Gun ownership and use, including a) the prevalence and distribution of firearms, b) where guns were obtained, c) the practice of carrying weapons away from home, and d) trends in gun ownership;
- ▶ Connection between gun ownership and attitudes toward firearms;
- ▶ Socio-demographic differences in attitudes toward firearms;
- ▶ Knowledge about guns and gun control laws;

- ▶ Crime concerns and experiences and guns,
- ▶ Attitudes toward government and guns;
- ▶ Use of firearms for protection against crime;
- ▶ Safety issues related to firearms, including a) the perceived safety that guns provide and b) concerns about being around guns;
- ▶ Relation between gender and firearms;
- ▶ Children and guns; and
- ▶ Gun safety as a public health concern.

This report primarily utilizes data from 1) the 1998 National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS-98); 2) the 1997-1998 National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS-97); 3) the 1996 National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS-96); and 4) the 1972-1998 General Social Survey (GSS) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. The NGPSs were designed in collaboration with the Center for Gun Policy and Research of The Johns Hopkins University with funding from the Joyce Foundation of Chicago. Supplemental data from various state and national polls were also employed and are cited when used.

The NGPS-96, NGPS-97, and NGPS-98 are national, random-digit-dial telephone surveys of adults living in households with phones. Data were collected from September 13 to November 11, 1996; from November 8, 1997 to January 27, 1998; and September 10 to November 15, 1998. Analysis used a post-stratification weight that adjusted for age, gender, race, education, and region according to U.S. Census figures. Full technical details on the NGPSs appear in Haggerty and Shin, 1997; Woolley, Kuby, and Shin, 1998; and Kuby, Imhof, and Shin, 1999. The GSSs are full-probability, in-person interviews of adults living in households in the United States. The latest data were collected in February-May, 1998. Full technical details are presented in Davis, Smith, and Marsden, 1998.

THE REGULATION OF FIREARMS

Public support for the regulation of firearms is strong and widespread (Smith, 1980; Stinchcombe, et al., 1980; Wright, 1981; Crocker, 1981; Tyler and Lavrakas, 1983; Wright, 1988; Kleck, 1991; Kauder, 1993; Vernick, et al., 1993; Hill, 1994; Edel, 1995; Spritzer, 1995; Adams, 1996; Flanagan and Longmire, 1996; Blendon, et al., 1996; Schuldt, et al., 1997; Carter, 1997; Kates, 1997; Kleck, 1997; Public Policy Forum, 1997; Smith, 1997; Hemenway and Azael,

n.d.; Bowie, et al., 1998; Frank N. Magid, 1998; Peter D. Hart, 1998; "Poll," 1998; Michigan, 1998; and Teret, et al., 1998). Large majorities back most general measures for controlling guns, policies to increase gun safety, and laws to restrict criminals from acquiring firearms. Additionally, most people support more spending and even more taxes for specific programs to reduce gun violence. In general, people endorse all measures to regulate guns, increase gun safety, and reduce gun violence, except for policies that entail a blanket prohibition on owning guns.

General Gun Control Measures

As Table 1 indicates, majorities support 16 of 18 general measures to regulate guns:

- ▶ 90% favor requiring that serial numbers on guns be tamper resistant.
- ▶ 85% want both a background check and a five-day waiting period before a handgun may be purchased.
- ▶ 85% endorse the mandatory registration of handguns and 72% also want mandatory registration of longguns (rifles and shotguns).
- ▶ 82% support requiring a police permit before a gun can be purchased.
- ▶ 79% favor requiring background checks for sales between private individuals.
- ▶ 77% believe that the sale of handgun ammunition should be regulated the same as the sale of handguns.
- ▶ 75% 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."
- ▶ 73% want to ban the sale of all high-capacity gun magazines.
- ▶ 71% are willing to pay more taxes to increase police patrols to reduce gun injuries.
- ▶ 70% back the idea that all handgun owners should at least be licensed and trained in the use of their weapons.
- ▶ 69% want to exclude from the American market imported guns that cannot be bought by citizens in their country of origin, and 55% favor banning the importation of all civilian firearms.
- ▶ 60% favor allowing concealed-carry permits only for those with special needs such as private detectives.

- ▶ 54-58% want a ban on the domestic manufacture of “small, easily concealed, and inexpensive handguns.”¹
- ▶ 54% believe that things would be less safe if laws allow any adult who passes a criminal background check and a gun-safety course to carry a concealed gun in public.
- ▶ 40% feel that such permissive or shall-issue, concealed-carrying laws make things safer (6% neither more nor less safe and 1% don't know).

Majority support is lacking only for measures that call for the general prohibition of guns:

- ▶ 39% support restricting the possession of handguns to “the police and other authorized persons”
- ▶ Only 16% want a “total ban on handguns.”

To examine people's summary views on the general, gun-control measures, a scale was made that went from 0 for someone who rejected all 14 of the measures in Table 1 to a score of 14 for someone who accepted all 14 measures.² This scale shows that on average people approved of 8.4 of the 14 measures.

Safety-Related Gun-Control Measures

When it comes to firearms, most people's motto appears to be “safety first.” Support for safety-related, gun-control measures is even stronger than for the general policies. Majorities back all 15 items in Table 2:

- ▶ 95% favor having handguns manufactured in the United States meet the same safety and quality standards that imported handguns must meet and 90% endorse this position even if it would make handguns more expensive.

¹Support for a ban on manufacturing increases from 54% to 58% when the descriptor “often known as Saturday night specials” is added. See Table 1 for full wordings. The differences are not statistically significant at the .05 level. For the meaning and use of the term “Saturday night special,” see Oliver, 1996.

²There are 18 separate percentages in Table 1, but two come from different recodes of the same item (see note a in Table 1). For this item with two entries we counted only those favoring a total ban on handguns as pro-gun control. Also, eliminated from the scale were the items that appeared only on the NGPS-97 (2) and GSS-98 (1). See Table 1 for details.

- ▶ 90% also support mandatory “gun-safety training” before a person can buy a gun, 77% want all current gun owners to take such a course, and 55% feel that if current owners won't take the course, then they should be required to turn in their weapons.
- ▶ 88% back having all new handguns designed so that they “cannot be fired by a young child's small hands.”
- ▶ 82% support a requirement that pistols have magazine safeties.
- ▶ 80% want owners to be liable if a gun is not stored properly and is misused by a child.
- ▶ 79% are in favor of making manufacturers liable for any injuries that result from defects in the design or manufacturing of guns.
- ▶ 78% back the requirement that guns be stored unloaded, 77% that trigger locks must be used, and 74% that guns be kept in locked boxes or cabinets.
- ▶ 75% want the federal government to regulate the safety design of guns.
- ▶ 73% favor having all new handguns come with a load indicator to show if the weapon is loaded or not.
- ▶ 70-75% back having all new handguns be personalized so that only the owner of a weapon will be able to fire the gun.³

To look at people's overall view of measures to promote safety, a scale was made that ranged from 0 for someone who opposed all 11 items in Table 2 to 11 for someone who backed each safety proposal.⁴ On average, people supported 8.6 of the 11 safety-related measures.

In sum, substantial majorities consistently support all safety-related policies including: 1) technological measures to make guns safer (childproofing, personalizing, magazine safeties, and load indicators), 2) tougher general safety standards for the design and manufacture of guns, 3) mandatory safe-storage requirements, 4) the training of all gun owners, and 5) miscellaneous safety-promoting measures such as holding manufacturers liable for defects in design and production.

³Two versions of the personalized gun question were used on NGPS-98. The standard wording showed 69.8% supporting that all new handguns be personalized. The revised wording put support at 74.5%. These differences were statistically significant at the .037 level. See Table 2 for wordings.

⁴There are 15 questions in Table 2, but one is a sub-question of another item. These two items (the first two listed in the question wording section of Table 2) were combined into a single item to construct the gun safety scale. Also, three items appeared only on NGPS-97 and cannot be used in the scale.

Guns and Criminals

People want to keep guns out of the hands of criminals (Table 3). First, state laws now typically restrict convicted felons from legally purchasing guns, but most states allow most of those convicted of misdemeanors to buy guns. The public, however, is much less willing to let those convicted of a variety of less serious crimes purchase firearms. 90% want to prevent those convicted of domestic violence from buying guns, and disapproval is 84% for those who illegally carried a concealed weapon without a permit, 84% for those guilty of being drunk and disorderly, 81% for simple assault, and 68% for those who drove a car while intoxicated. Of the four misdemeanors asked about in 1998, 57% wanted to prohibit all types of criminals from being able to buy a gun; or, on average, people supported prohibition for 3.2 of these four crimes.

Second, people believe that the criminal misuse of firearms is a serious matter that deserves tough punishment. 85% agree that “the illegal possession of a gun should be treated as a serious crime like a robbery or burglary” and 82% think that “if a gun is used during a crime, the sentence should be twice as long.” (72% agree with both statements and only 5% disagree with both.)

Third, the concern about controlling the criminal misuse of guns is so strong that 75% 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.”

Finally, several of the other measures cited in Table 1, such as mandatory background checks for purchases of guns and ammunition, are based on the desire to restrict the access of criminals to guns.

Willingness to Pay for Anti-Gun Violence Measures

When it comes to fighting gun violence, people are willing to put their money where their opinions are. First, on the 1997-1998 NGPS, people endorse more government spending for research in a number of areas, even when reminded that more taxes may be needed to cover greater expenditures (Table 4). Support is greatest for health care research, intermediate for crime topics like juvenile delinquency and gun violence, and least for military weapons. Specifically, more spending on “research to understand and prevent firearm injuries and deaths” is favored by 47%, while 23% want to maintain current levels, 27% want a reduction, and 2% don't know.

Second, people were asked if they would “vote for or against a new program in your state to reduce gun thefts and illegal gun dealers. This program would

make it more difficult for criminals and delinquents to obtain guns. It would reduce gun injuries by about 30%, but taxes would have to be increased to pay for it." Random thirds of the respondents were then told different amounts for the annual increase in taxes that would be needed to finance the program. 73% said they'd vote for a \$50 increase, 67% for a \$100 increase, and 62% for a \$200 increase. Those that opposed a particular tax were then asked if they would back a tax at half the previously stated level and those who supported a tax increase were asked if they would pay a tax at twice the levy. These follow-up questions indicated that 79% would back a \$25 tax and that 38% would vote for a tax increase of \$400. This shows substantial public willingness to accept additional taxes to curb illegal access to guns and reduce gun violence. Support naturally decreases as the price tag is raised, but a majority backs a personal tax increase of at least \$200 per annum. In addition, a willingness to accept a financial cost for extending firearms regulations shows up in several of the questions in Tables 1 and 2 discussed above. For example, the items on tampering with serial numbers and on extending the safety and quality standards applied to imports to domestically manufactured guns mention that these measures may increase costs. In each case, support was strong despite the mention of higher costs. For example, 92% of those favoring applying import standards to domestic guns still were in favor even if this made handguns more expensive.

Regulating Firearms Like Tobacco

Several cities have sued the firearm industry, attempting to hold gun manufacturers and/or sellers liable for the injuries inflicted by their weapons. In part, these suits are inspired by the success of litigation against the tobacco industry (Cohen, 1998; Irvine, 1998; and Swanson, 1999). So far the public is not willing to apply this legal theory to firearms. Only 37% favor their state or city, "suing gun manufacturers for the medical costs of gun victims and gun injuries;" 59% are opposed; and 4% are unsure or don't know.

People are willing, however, to take another page from the tobacco-industry book. 75% think Congress should hold hearings to investigate the practices of the gun industry similar to the hearings held about the tobacco industry.⁵ 23% are opposed and 2% are unsure.

⁵The full wording is "All but one of the major American gun manufacturers are private companies that do not file public reports about their gun business. Foreign companies that export guns to America also do not file public reports. In the last several years, Congress has conducted several major hearings to investigate the tobacco industry. But Congress has never held similar hearings on the firearms industry. Should or should not Congress hold hearings to investigate the practices of the gun industry?"

Imports and Firearms

As indicated in Tables 1 and 2, people want to tighten firearms regulations in relation to imported guns. First, people want to limit the importation of guns (Table 1). 55% want to prohibit the importation of non-military weapons to the United States, and 69% want to ban the import of firearms that cannot be sold to citizens in their country of origin. Considered together, 53% want to ban imports in general, 15% want to allow only imports that can be sold to citizens in the country of origin, 27% want no import ban, and 6% are unsure or give other answers.

Second, the public wants domestic guns to follow safety standards now imposed on imported weapons (Table 2). 95% think that handguns made in the United States should meet the same “safety and quality standards” that imports must meet. 90% feel these standards should be met even if that makes handguns more expensive.

Gun-Carrying Laws

Most people are concerned about the carrying of concealed weapons and laws that would encourage same. First, 60% oppose permissive, shall-issue laws, favoring the issuing of concealed-carry permits only to those with special needs (see also Adams, 1996). 83% believe that “public places, such as stores, movies theaters, and restaurants” should be allowed to prohibit people from bringing guns onto their premises. 92% of those opposed to shall-issue laws and even 70% in favor of them think that individual businesses should be allowed to prohibit carry within their establishments. Support varies by whether people think permissive concealed-carrying laws promote or hinder safety (see later section, Perceived Safety that Guns Provide). Among those who see safety as enhanced, 38% favor restricting permits to those with special needs; and for those who see safety as compromised, 79% oppose permissive laws. Likewise, approval of store-owner prohibitions increases from 71% among those who see concealed-carry laws as increasing safety to 94% among those who see safety as compromised.

The Second Amendment

Most Americans feel that the Second Amendment to the Constitution guarantees people the right to own firearms.⁶ For example, in a 1997 ICR Research Group poll, after being read the text of the Second Amendment, 68%

⁶On legal interpretations of the Second Amendment, see Barnett, 1998; “Second Amendment,” 1998; and Edel, 1995.

said it guaranteed individuals the right to own guns; and in a Wisconsin poll by the Public Policy Forum, 76% agreed that “owning a handgun is an American right (Public Policy Forum, 1997).”

But people narrowly reject the idea that the Second Amendment stands in the way of strict gun control. For example, in a 1993 Gallup poll, 51% disagreed that “strict gun control laws violate the Constitution” and in a 1997 Penn, Schoen, and Berland poll of registered voters, 51% accepted the statement that “gun control laws are necessary to fight crime,” 42% endorsed the competing idea that “gun control laws infringe on the right to bear arms,” and 7% were unsure.

Moreover, concerns about the Second Amendment recede when specific gun-control measures are considered. In a 1998 Penn, Schoen, and Berland poll of registered voters, 25% agreed that “we need to start placing substantially more controls on guns, possibly making handguns illegal altogether;” 46% thought that “the government should regulate guns by enacting waiting periods for background checks, but continue to allow basic gun ownership;” and 25% chose that “gun control infringes on our constitutional right to bear arms and we should stay out of it.” Similarly, in a 1989 Los Angeles Times poll that asked, “As you know, the Second Amendment to the Constitution guarantees the right of people to keep and bear arms. In the case of semi-automatic assault rifles, do you think the interests of public safety outweigh this constitutional protection, or not?” 59% thought public safety won out, 29% backed the Second Amendment, and 12% were unsure. Likewise, in Wisconsin in 1997, 59% agreed that the “Second Amendment permits the government to require that handguns meet certain safety standards” (Public Policy Forum, 1997); 37% disagreed; and 4% were unsure.

Trends in Attitudes toward the Regulation of Firearms

Support for the regulation of firearms is strong and generally strengthening (Table 5). First, for the 10 general regulation items that were repeated between 1996 and 1998, there were statistically significant declines in support for three items (keeping guns from criminals even if harder for the law-abiding, thinking concealed-carry laws make it less safe, and a total ban on handguns); one item showed no significant change (restricting the sale of handgun ammunition); and six showed a significant increase in support for regulating guns (mandatory registration of handguns and longguns, police permit before purchasing a gun, concealed-carrying only for special needs, background checks for private sales, and banning handguns except to the police/authorized persons).

Second, all six safety-related items showed increased support for regulations and beliefs about gun safety.

Third, of the four criminal prohibition items, significantly more people over time wanted to deny guns for three crimes (conviction of drunk driving, simple assault, and domestic violence), and there was no change in attitudes toward illegal gun carrying.

Of the 20 trends there was pro-gun-control movement on 15 items, an anti-gun-control shift on three items, and no significant directional change on two items. The most consistent gain in support was toward safety-related items and items restricting criminals, with less widespread increases on the general regulation measures. Overall, support for gun control remained high and fairly stable, with a majority of items showing small to moderate shifts toward more gun control.

GUN OWNERSHIP AND USE

The Prevalence and Distribution of Firearms

The personal ownership of firearms in the United States is probably more widespread than in any other developed nation in the world (Killias, 1993b). As Table 6A indicates, about 38% of households have a gun and 23% contain a handgun. Longguns are more common than handguns, with 14.5% of households having only longguns and 6% just handguns. In addition, 18% of households have both longguns and handguns. 25% of respondents personally own a gun (as opposed to merely living in a household with a gun), and 16% personally own a handgun. Also, 20% have bought a handgun. Responses for both handgun purchases and the possession of handguns indicate that 31% of adults have had contact with handguns (12% have both bought a handgun and have a handgun in their household; 11% did not buy, but live with a handgun; and 7% have purchased, but do not currently, possess a handgun).

Gun ownership is concentrated among certain socio-demographic groups (Table 6B). The profile of gun owners is as follows:

- ▶ Both household and personal ownership is greater among men than women.
- ▶ Ownership is lowest in the Northeast, intermediate in the Midwest and West, and highest in the South.
- ▶ The married are most likely to have guns in general, with ownership next highest among the divorced and separated (except for the separated on personally owning a gun). The widowed and never married are generally the least likely to have a weapon.
- ▶ Gun ownership does not vary greatly by educational level.
- ▶ Gun ownership generally increases with household income. This reflects three factors. Households with more income are better able to afford firearms and to participate in gun sports, have more wealth to protect, and have more adults living in them. However, ownership levels appear to drop off somewhat among the highest income groups.
- ▶ Gun ownership is highest for the middle-aged, especially those aged 50-64 years. Adults under 30 and over 65 are less likely to own guns. The decline among the over 65 age group is partly the result of the greater proportion of women among the elderly. The lower levels among younger adults is partly due to the decline in hunting over the last 25 years.

- ▶ Households with zero or 1 child under 18 years old are somewhat, but not significantly, more likely to contain guns than households with two or more children.

Gun ownership is appreciable among virtually all segments of society but is highest among social groups connected to America's traditional gun culture and to hunting in particular. This means older men living in rural areas are most likely to both have guns in their households and personally own a firearm. Women in urban areas and with low incomes are least likely to possess firearms.

Where Handguns Were Obtained

The fifth of adults who have purchased a handgun were asked where they had obtained their weapons. As Table 7 shows, the major sources of handguns were: gun stores (34%), other retail stores (19%), gifts (12%), friends (11%), inheritances (10%), private sellers (8%), pawnshops (6%), relatives (4%), and mail order (2%). These sources were then classified into two groups: 1) generally well-regulated sources of weapons (gun shops, retail stores, mail order, police work, or other employment) and 2) less well-regulated and more informal sources (pawnshops, private sales, inheritances, gifts, etc.). 41% reported that they obtained handguns from well-regulated sources only, 37% only from less regulated and more informal sources, 10% from both sources, and 12% from unknown sources. Thus, almost half of all people with handguns in their households obtained at least one of their handguns from less well-regulated channels.

Carrying Firearms Away from Home

While about 38% of households contain a gun and 23% have a handgun, only about 9% of adults have carried a handgun away from home during the last year.⁷ Handgun carrying may be declining, with 12% reporting carrying in 1997-1998, but only 9% in 1998. Even among residents of gun-owning

⁷On the NGPS-97 the rate of carrying guns could be estimated from two items. First, as part of an anti-crime battery (Smith, 1998), 11% report that they "carried a gun away from home" during the last year to protect themselves from crime. Second, as part of a series on gun-carrying per se, 12% said they carried a handgun away from home either on their person or in their car or truck during the last year. Comparing these similar, but not matching items, indicates that 7% said they carried a gun on both questions and 16% to one or the other question. These can be considered as low and high estimates of the annual incidence of carrying guns away from home. The items differ in that the general protection item includes all guns, but only for the purpose of protection, and the latter item includes only handguns, but for all purposes, and it is restricted to people currently living in a household with a firearm. Only the second item appears on NGPS-98. See also the Oregon estimates in Nelson, et al., 1996.

households, carrying handguns away from home is fairly uncommon, with only 23% having done so in the last year.

People carry handguns away from home for various reasons. The most common reason (69% of those carrying a gun) was going to a firing range or for target practice. This was followed by personal protection (57%), hunting (32%), work-related (22%), and other (25%). Many people carried a handgun for more than one reason, with people on average mentioning two reasons. Among handgun carriers, 52% cited both protection and another reason, 31.5% mentioned only other reasons, 5.5% gave protection as their only reason, and 11% gave incomplete answers.

Handgun carriers are quite variable in how often they report taking a weapon away from home. 22% report carrying a handgun almost daily, 11% several times a week to weekly, 7% several times a month, 10% about once a month, 25% several times a year, 13% only once, and 12% were unsure or didn't indicate.

Half of handgun carriers usually have their weapon loaded when they are carrying it. Frequent handgun carriers are more likely to have a loaded weapon than less frequent users. 90% of those who carry a handgun about once a week or more often usually have it loaded, while only 41% of those who carry it less than weekly usually have it loaded. Those who carry a gun for protection are also more likely to have it loaded. 76% of those carrying for protection usually have it loaded, while just 30% of those who carry it only for other reasons have it loaded.

Almost half (47%) of handgun carriers have a permit for carrying a handgun. Permits are more common among frequent handgun carriers (weekly or more often=79%; less than weekly=38%); among those who carry it for protection (for protection=62%; not for protection=37.5%); and among those who have multiple reasons for carrying a handgun (1 reason=54%; 2 reasons=57.5%, 3+ reasons=67%).

Trends in Gun Ownership

The proportion of households with a firearm has been in slow decline over the last quarter century (Table 8). In the early 1970s about 50% of adults lived in households that kept a firearm. This number has now fallen to below 40%. This decline is partly the result of a decrease in household size. From 1980 until 1997 the proportion of adults personally owning a gun held steady at about 29%. However, in 1998 even this level showed evidence of decline to about 23-25% of adults personally owning a gun.

There has also been a shift in the types of firearms that people own. As hunting has declined as a recreational pursuit (Smith, 1997), the proportion of adults in households with longguns has decreased from about 42% in the early 1970s to about 29-31% today. Partly compensating for this drop, the proportion of adults living in a household with a handgun rose from about 20% in the early 1970s to 24-25% in the mid-1990s. However, this number may also now be waning, with only 21-23% reporting living in a household with a handgun in 1998. Likewise, the proportion ever having bought a handgun increased from 21% in 1996 to 25% in 1997-98 and then fell to 20% in 1998.⁸

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN GUN OWNERSHIP AND ATTITUDES TOWARD FIREARMS

The possession of firearms strongly shapes attitudes toward the regulation of firearms, beliefs about gun safety, and opinions on other gun-related issues. As Table 9 shows, people's views vary greatly according to whether they personally own a gun, live in a household with a gun (but don't personally own a firearm), or live in a household without guns.

First, 40 of the 45 comparisons show statistically significant differences. In this sense there is little consensus between gun owners and non-gun owners on firearms and how they should be regulated.

Second, in 43 cases and in all 40 cases where there are statistically significant differences, people who personally own guns are more pro-gun (i.e., less for regulation, less concerned about safety issues) than those without guns.⁹ Besides being pervasive, these differences are often quite strong. In 15 cases the gap is 20 percentage points or more.

Third, in most cases (28 of 45) those living in gun households, but not personally owning guns, are intermediate in their attitudes between those who personally own guns and those living in households without guns. In all but two instances others in gun households are more supportive of the regulation of firearms and more concerned about their safety than those who personally own guns (see note 9). In 17 cases they are even marginally more pro-gun

⁸The quantity of new handguns (domestic manufacturing plus net imports) increased in the 1980s and early 1990s, then declined (O'Connell, 1998).

⁹The two exceptions (i.e., the only negative difference scores in Table 9) are that 1) support for making gun manufacturers liable for defective guns is very high for everybody and marginally higher among people who personally own guns (this exception makes sense, since increasing the manufacturer's responsibility benefits gun users) and 2) gun owners are more likely to favor doubling the sentences of criminals using guns (the position endorsed by the National Rifle Association). Neither of these reversals is statistically significant.

control than those from households without guns. This non-linearity comes mostly from the fact that the non-owners tend to be women (see Table 6B) and women tend to be more for gun control than men are (see the section on Gender and Firearms below).

These patterns, of course, also show up on the three regulation scales. On the general firearm regulation scale, personal owners back 6.9 measures; others in gun households support 8.6 items; and those in non-gun households approve of 9.1 items. Similarly, personal owners favor 7.1 safety measures; others in gun households back 9.0 measures; and those without guns are for 9.2 proposals. Likewise, personal owners want to bar 2.8 types of criminals from buying guns compared to 3.4 for both others in gun households and those in non-gun households.

Finally, despite the large differences by gun ownership and the systematically lower backing for the regulation of firearms among those who personally own guns, support for gun-control policies is actually quite high even among gun owners. For 10 of the 17 general regulation measures, 14 of the 15 safety policies, and all 7 of the items about guns and criminals, a majority of those who personally own guns favor the restriction of firearms. For example, 60% of those who personally own guns want the sale of handgun ammunition regulated like handguns themselves; 75% favor the mandatory registration of handguns; 81% endorse childproofing handguns; and 70% want to deny guns to those convicted of a simple assault. Thus, while less supportive of gun regulation than non-owners, those who personally own guns are in favor of most specific proposals to regulate guns, increase gun safety, and curb the access of criminals to guns.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDES TOWARD FIREARMS

With the exception of the sharp and consistent differences between men and women, which are discussed in a later section, most demographic groups do not differ greatly in their attitudes toward the regulation of firearms (Table 10). The key patterns are as follows:

- ▶ Residents of the Northeast are the most supportive of general regulation and safety-related measures. Those in the West and South are least in favor of these policies. The West shows the least support for barring criminals from purchasing guns.
- ▶ Marital status does not make a great difference in attitude. Any differences tend to be small and are not consistent across the scales.

- ▶ Those with a college education are more likely to back general firearm regulation policies but are not distinctive in their views on safety-related matters and keeping criminals from buying guns.
- ▶ Income is not related to general firearm regulation and gun-safety attitudes, but those with the lowest income are most in favor of barring criminals from obtaining guns.
- ▶ Support for safety-related measures is highest among the youngest adults, but restricting criminals is backed most by the oldest adults. General regulation doesn't vary by age.
- ▶ Number of children in the household is unrelated to firearm attitudes.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT GUNS AND GUN CONTROL LAWS

Public knowledge about guns and gun-control laws is limited (Table 11; see also Public Policy Forum, 1997; Bowie, et al., 1998; Peter D. Hart, 1998; and Smith, 1998). The five knowledge items that were included form two distinct factors. The first three items form a factor concerning knowledge about the use and misuse of guns, and the latter two form a factor about knowledge of government regulations of firearms.

The three items on the use and misuse of guns show that majorities know that 1) most murders involve guns (63% correct); 2) first-time gun owners need training in gun use and safety and should not rely solely on a manufacturer's instruction manual (68%); and 3) guns should always be kept unloaded until ready to use (85%). The two items on gun-control laws show the public has considerably lower levels of knowledge of government firearm regulation: 1) 29% know that guns manufactured in the United States are not regulated by federal safety standards and 2) 41.5% know whether their state has a law or court ruling that holds a gun owner liable if a child uses the gun and injures someone.

Scales were made for these two factors. The use/misuse knowledge scale runs from a low score of 3 for someone who gave the incorrect response to each item and strongly agreed/disagreed, to a score of 15 for someone who gave the correct response and strongly agreed/disagreed. The average use/misuse knowledge score was 10.9. The gun-control law knowledge scale ran from 2 for someone who gave two incorrect answers to 4 for someone who gave both correct responses. The mean score was 2.9.

Personal gun owners were the least knowledgeable on both scales. On use/misuse knowledge they scored 10.3, compared to 11.3 for those living in a

household with a gun but not personally owning a weapon, and 11.0 for those without any guns in their household. Similarly, on gun-control laws the scores were 2.7 for personal owners, 3.0 for others in households with guns, and 3.0 in non-gun households. Likewise, those who have bought a handgun are less informed about gun use/misuse (10.3) than those who have never purchased a handgun (11.0). Similarly, handgun buyers scored 2.7 on knowledge about gun-control laws vs. 3.0 for non-buyers.

While most people correctly know that guns should be kept unloaded and that first-time gun owners need to do more than read a manufacturer's manual, knowledge is less than ideal among those with access to guns. 61% of personal gun owners, 76% of others in a household with a gun, and 69% of those without guns in their household know that a manufacturer's manual is not sufficient instruction for a first-time gun owner. Likewise, 75% of personal owners are aware that guns should be kept unloaded except when they are to be used, as are 92% of those in households with guns and 89% of those without guns. Thus, 29% of personal guns owners fail to give the correct response about first-time buyers learning about firearms, and 25% fail to give the correct response about when guns should be loaded. This indicates a substantial gap in knowledge about firearm safety among those who personally own and are responsible for guns in their own households.

Support for the regulation of firearms increases as knowledge about both the use/misuse of guns and gun-control laws rises. Those scoring below 10 on use/misuse knowledge backed fewer than 7 gun laws, but those scoring 14+ endorsed more than 10 gun laws. Similarly, those with the least knowledge on gun-control laws favor 7.8 general firearm policies, while those with the most knowledge support 8.9 measures. Likewise, those scoring below 10 on use/misuse endorse fewer than 7 safety measures, while those scoring at the top in knowledge categories (14+) favor 10 measures. Similarly, as knowledge of gun-control laws grows, support for safety laws climbs from 8.2 to 9.1. Finally, support for keeping guns out of the hands of criminals also grows as both use/misuse and gun-control knowledge rises.

CRIME CONCERNS AND EXPERIENCES AND GUNS

Concern about crime and experiences with crime and the law have various impacts on attitudes toward guns. First, concerns about crime were measured by an open-ended question in which people were asked what was the most important problem facing the country. 24% mentioned crime and violence, 13.5% drugs, and 2% guns. 35% mentioned one or more of these problems. Firearm regulation is more supported by those mentioning these crime-related problems. People mentioning no such problems backed 8.35 general

regulations, those mentioning one problem favored 8.55 policies, and those citing two or more problems supported 8.6 measures. For the safety scale the pattern was similar: no mentions= 8.4 measures; one mention= 9.0; and 2+ mentions= 9.3. For barring criminals from getting guns, the pattern was no mentions=3.2, one mention=3.4, and 2+ mentions=3.3.¹⁰

Second, judgments about how the level of crime has changed has a complex relationship with attitudes on the regulation of firearms. The highest support for general firearm regulations (8.7), safety measures (8.9), and denying guns to criminals (3.4) is among those who think crime has increased. Among those who think crime has decreased, support is less (general firearm regulation=8.3; safety=8.5; and denying criminals=3.2). Among those who think there was no change in crime levels, approval is lower still (general firearm regulation=8.0; safety=8.0; and denying criminals=3.1). Thus, the relationship is not linear.

Third, support for firearms regulation is greater among those who have avoided ever being ticketed or arrested by the police. Those never ticketed by the police for a traffic violation other than illegal parking are more supportive of general firearm regulation, safety measures, and denying guns to criminals than are those ticketed by the police (respectively, 8.6 vs. 8.3; 8.8 vs. 8.5; and 3.4 vs. 3.1). Similarly, those never arrested by the police back more firearms regulations, safety measures, and restrictions on criminals than those ever charged or picked up by the police (respectively, 8.5 vs. 8.35; 8.6 vs. 8.5; and 3.3 vs 2.8).¹¹

Finally, on the personal safety from gun violence item asked on NGPS-97, 70% said they were safe, 5% were unsure, and 25% disagreed that they lived in a safe, low-risk area (Smith, 1998). People who live in a safe area and think there is little chance of becoming a gunshot victim do not differ from those living in more dangerous neighborhoods in their support for general measures to regulate firearms, gun-safety policies, or denying guns to criminals. People apparently evaluate these policies on the basis of their overall utility and general concerns about crime, and not based on how exposed to gun violence individuals personally perceive themselves to be.¹²

¹⁰The differences for the general regulation measures are not statistically significant at the .05 level.

¹¹One study also finds that those who are lower on psychoticism are more in favor of gun control (Bernard and Lester, 1998).

¹²On the relationship between crime, fear of crime, and gun control attitudes, see Smith, 1980; Stinchcombe, et al., 1980; Kleck, 1996; Adams, 1996; and Heath, Weeks, and Murphy, 1997. On neighborhood factors see McClain, 1983.

Experiences with crime have a complex and varied impact on attitudes toward guns. Those mentioning crime, drugs, or guns as the most important problem facing the country, those who see crime as increasing, and those who have never been arrested or ticketed by the police are more for gun control than their counterparts. However, living in a low risk area and thinking that one has little chance of being a victim of gun violence is not related to attitudes toward the regulation of firearms. It appears to be social concerns about crime more than personal exposure that generate more support for controlling guns.

ATTITUDES TOWARD GOVERNMENT AND GUNS

People who are skeptical about government in general tend to be skeptical about gun control. Attitudes toward the government were measured by asking people whether they agreed or disagreed that “taxes are too high,” “government programs are usually effective,” and “government does too many things already.” A scale was made that started at a score of 3 for someone who strongly agreed that taxes were too high, strongly disagreed that government programs were effective, and strongly agreed that the government does too much; the upper limit was the pro-government score of 15 for someone taking the opposite positions. Government-action scores were then grouped into four levels (very low=3-4; low=5-6; medium=7-8; high=9+).

On all three gun scales, opposition to government-action is associated with less support for the regulation of firearms. Those very opposed to government actions backed 6.4 general measures compared to 8.1 for those with low support for government action, 8.45 for those with medium attitudes, and 9.1 for high government-action sentiments. Likewise, the very low government-action people favored 6.5 safety policies, followed by 8.2 for the lows, 8.7 for the mediums, and 9.2 for the highs. Similarly, the very low anti-government group wants to bar 2.7 types of criminals from buying guns, while the figures for the low anti-government group= 3.0; the medium= 3.3; and the high= 3.4. Thus, a general skepticism toward government action reduces support for programs that call for more government regulations.

On the GSS a similar pattern emerges. 83% of those with complete confidence in the “courts and legal system” want to require a police permit before a gun can be purchased, but only 69% of those with no confidence back police screening. Similarly, 84% of those who disagree that “most public officials are not really interested in the problems of the average man” favor police permits compared to 79% of those who agree with this statement. Likewise, the National Opinion Survey on Crime and Justice found that low confidence in the police was related to less support for gun-control laws (Adams, 1996).

GUNS AND PROTECTION

About two-fifths of people in households with guns have acquired their weapons “at least in part, for protection against crime.”¹³ This level has varied slightly but shows no clear trend over the last several years (1996=40%, 1997-1998=43%, 1998=39%). Personal gun owners are more likely to report that a gun was obtained for anti-crime purposes than others in households with guns (45% vs. 31%). Anti-crime protection is mentioned by 65% of those in households with only a handgun, by 53% in households with both handguns and longguns, and in 14% of households with only longguns.

The type of protection that most people expected from their gun was “to scare off anyone who might try to break into the home” (78%). This was followed by “to deal with animals such as stray dogs or snakes” (29%), “to protect someone in the household when out in public (17%), “to protect against someone known to your household, such as a neighbor or relative who has made threats” (7%), and for other reasons (8%).¹⁴

SAFETY ISSUES RELATED TO FIREARMS

People have mixed feelings about the safety that guns provide. Many see them as offering protection from crime and other threats (e.g., wild animals), but others see guns as a source of danger involving accidents, suicides, family disputes, etc. The balancing of the benefits that guns may provide versus the risks that they present is a major factor in forming people's view toward guns and the regulation of firearms.

Perceived Safety that Guns Provide

People are very divided about how much safety guns provide. First, in the case of whether having a gun in a home usually makes it safer or less safe, 43% consider an armed home as safer, 11% say it depends or aren't sure, and 46% think guns make it less safe. This fairly even split with neither the safer nor less safe position garnering a majority has prevailed from 1996 to 1998. The less safe position has gained some ground, however, from 43% in 1996, to 45% in 1997-1998, and 46% in 1998.

¹³The National Opinion Survey on Crime and Justice (Adams, 1996) found that 45% said sport was “main reason” for having a gun, 20% said protection against crime, 27% both, and 8% neither. Peter D. Hart's survey of parents (1998) found that 52% mentioning hunting, 20% protection, 26% recreational and target shooting, and 15% other (numbers total to more than 100% due to multiple mentions).

¹⁴Under other reasons the purpose of guns acquired for protection included: law enforcement work (4), business/work related (3), hunting (3), general protection/personal safety (3), and travelling (2).

To probe people's beliefs about how guns in the home promote or jeopardize safety, people were asked if they agreed/disagreed with six statements about gun safety (Table 12). The majority agreed that a gun in the home promotes a "sense of security" (73%) and allows people to "better protect themselves from home invaders" (60%), but only 20% agreed that a gun "reduced the chances of being burglarized." Even more people believe that a gun in the home increases certain problems. 54% agreed that it "increases domestic violence," 71% that "owners always have to worry about it [the gun] being stolen or misused," and 83% that it "increases the chances of someone accidentally being shot."

These six items were made into a net-safety scale that ran from -3 (meaning that one agreed that the three negative consequences would occur and none of the positive outcomes would happen) to +3 (for someone who agreed with all three positive occurrences and no negative results). Intermediate scores mean that people agreed with some mix of positive and negative statements.¹⁵ The net-safety scores were as follows: -3=13%, -2=20%, -1=20%, 0=21%, +1=14%, +2=8%, and +3=4%. That means that 53% saw more negative than positive consequences, 21% saw it as even, and 26% thought positive likelihoods outweighed the negative. The net-safety score suggests that public opinion leans more toward the assessment that guns in the home make things less safe (53%) than was indicated by the single item on guns and home safety (where 46% felt guns make things less safe); that more people are ambivalent or unsure (21% vs. 11%); and that fewer people see guns as making things safer (26% vs. 43%).

Of course, evaluations of the net safety that guns in the house provide strongly influence the public's overall judgement on the single item about safety. The percent thinking that guns make things less safe rises from almost 0 for those with a net-safety score of +3 to 89% for those with a score of -3 (+3=0.3%, +2=7.6%, +1=8.3%, 0= 29.5%, -1=55.2%, -2=80.3%, and -3=89.4%).

Judgments about guns and home safety vary considerably by gun ownership. 14% of those personally owning guns think guns make things less safe, as do 34% of those living in a household with a gun and 64% of those without any guns in their household. Similarly, for those having a negative net-safety score, judgments that guns make things less safe rise from 22.5% for those personally owning a gun to 42.5% for others in gun households, to 69% for those without guns in their households.

¹⁵This scale does not consider how serious or likely each of the six possible outcomes of having a gun may be. It gives equal weight to each possible occurrence.

Second, people differ over the safety afforded by widespread concealed-carrying. 39.5% see permissive concealed-gun-carrying laws as making things safer, 54% as less safe, 6% as neither safer nor less safe, and 1% are unsure. Safety assessments about concealed-carrying have not changed much over the last two years and show no clear trend. In 1996, 56% saw it as making things less safe; this fell to 47% in 1997-1998, and then rose again to 54% in 1998. Likewise, assessments that concealed-carry laws made things safer went from 36% in 1996 to 41% in 1997-1998, and to 39.5% in 1998.

Gun owners are more likely than non-gun owners to believe that permissive concealed-carry laws increase safety. Of those personally owning guns, 35% thought such laws would make it less safe, as did 56% of others in gun households and 62% of those without guns. Similarly, 37% of those who had ever bought a handgun believed permissive concealed-carry laws make it less safe compared to 58% of those who had never purchased a handgun. Likewise, 33% of those with both a handgun and a longgun in their household felt things would be less safe, as did 44% of those with only a handgun and 53% of those with only a longgun.

Another factor explaining why people differ on whether permissive concealed-carry laws would promote or hinder safety is the expected impact of such laws on the level of concealed-carrying. While such laws are designed to license more gun carriers and, as a result, would presumably increase the level of concealed-carrying, only 35% of the public thinks gun-carrying would increase, 44% that it would remain the same, 17% that it would decrease, and 3.5% are unsure. Of those who think gun-carrying would increase under permissive carry laws, only 24% believe such laws would make things safer; for those who think there would be no change in the level of gun-carrying, 49.5% think it would be safer, and for those who see gun-carrying as decreasing, 49% feel safety would increase.¹⁶

Considering these two gun-safety items jointly indicates that 23.5% feel that both a gun in the home and allowing more guns on the streets improves safety.¹⁷ 31% take the opposite position that guns in both cases decrease safety. 16.5% take the intermediate positions that a gun in the home increases safety while allowing more carrying of guns decreases safety, and another 13% think homes with guns are less safe, but feel that allowing more concealed-carrying

¹⁶Hemenway and Azrael (n.d.) found that 62% said they would feel less safe and 12% more safe if more people in their community began carrying guns.

¹⁷These items are not parallel in that the one asks about whether guns in a house makes things safer and the other asks whether laws permitting concealed-carrying makes things safer. A more parallel comparison would ask about safety from concealed guns being carried around.

would make things safer. Finally, some are unsure about the safety impact of one or both situations (14%) or think that both have no impact on safety (2%).¹⁸

Likewise, people who have not kept or acquired a gun for protection are more likely to believe both that guns in the home and on the street make things less safe. For example, of those who obtained a gun at least in part for protection against crime, 11% feel that guns in the home make it less safe and 36% think that allowing more concealed carrying of guns would reduce safety. Among gun owners who did not acquire a gun for protection, 27% think homes are less safe with guns and 46% consider more guns on the street as being more dangerous. Safety concerns are even less for those who carried guns for protection during the last year. Only 8% of gun carriers consider guns in the home less safe and 35% believe that permissive concealed-carrying laws would decrease safety.

Concerns about Being Around Guns

Parents are concerned about their children being around guns.¹⁹ People with children under 18 years of age were asked if they would let their child “play in or visit” a house with a handgun present. 68% approved if the handgun was both “unloaded and locked away,” 38% if the handgun was “loaded but is locked away,” and 7% if the handgun was “loaded and not locked way.” These figures have not significantly changed in the last year.

In addition, according to the results of NGPS-97, 30% of parents would allow “in your house, as a guest, someone who you know is carrying a handgun, that is someone other than a law enforcement officer.” These differences show once again that safety concerns are a major factor in shaping attitudes toward guns. While a majority of parents (68%) would allow their child around a handgun that was safely stored (locked and unloaded), only a small minority (7%) would tolerate a child being around an unsafely stored weapon (loaded and unlocked).

Gun-owning parents are less opposed to their children being around guns than parents without guns. Of parents who personally own a gun, 13% do not want their child to visit a household with a locked and unloaded handgun,

¹⁸On the impact of general gun control and concealed-carry laws on crime and suicide, see McDowall, Loftin, and Wiersema, 1995; Leenaars and Lester, 1996; Lott and Mustard, 1997; Webster, et al., 1997; Kwon, et al., 1997; and Lott, 1998.

¹⁹See also Peter D. Hart, 1998, on parents and guns; on the safe storage of firearms, see Weil and Hemenway, 1992, and Hemenway, Solnick, and Azrael, 1995.

36% object if the handgun is loaded but locked away, and 80% are opposed if the handgun is loaded and unlocked. For parents living in households with a gun, but not personally owning one, the respective objection levels are 16%, 57%, and 97%; and for parents without guns in their households, opposition is 42%, 70%, and 96%, respectively. Similarly, NGPS-97 shows that allowing a visitor with a gun in one's home is opposed by 44% of those personally owning guns; 68% of those living in households with a gun but not personally owning one, and 72% of those without guns.

Those who think that having a gun makes a home safer are also less opposed to allowing their children visit a household with a gun. 16% of parents who see guns as enhancing safety object to a child's visit to a household with a locked and unloaded gun, compared to 43% of parents who think guns make a household less safe. If the gun is locked away but loaded, opposition grows to 42% and 77%, respectively, and if the gun is loaded and not locked away, opposition climbs to 85% and 98%. Similarly, NGPS-97 shows that a guest with a gun would be permitted by 49% of those who see guns as increasing safety and 19% of those who think guns lessen safety.

GENDER AND FIREARMS

Men and women have fundamentally different viewpoints on firearms and their regulation. First, women are more opposed to violence and the use of force in general than are men (Smith, 1984; Wirls, 1986; Finlay and Love, 1988; Smith, 1997).

Second, as Table 13E indicates, men are much more likely to own and use guns than women are (Smith and Smith, 1995; Glick, 1995; Weisman, 1995; Hopper et al., 1996; Thompson, et al., 1996; and Ludwig, Cook, and Smith, 1998). For example, 42% of men and 10% of women personally own a gun; 34% of men and 8% of women have ever bought a handgun; and 15% of men and 4.5% of women carried a gun away from home during the last year. Also, 43% of men and 34% of women report that a gun in their household was acquired at least in part to protect against crime.

Third, across all 45 topics, women are more concerned about guns and more in favor of their regulation, and 41 of the differences are statistically significant (Tables 13A-D). For example, 38% of men and 55% of women think that homes are less safe if guns are present (+17 points); 82% of men and 89% of women want handguns registered (+7 points); and 23% of fathers and 38.5% of mothers would not let their child visit a home with even a locked and unloaded gun present (+15.5 points). This same pattern emerges when the three firearm regulation scales introduced earlier are examined. Men support

7.8 and women 9.0 of the general gun control measures (prob=.000); men back 7.9 and women 9.2 of the gun-safety policies (prob=.000); and men want 2.9 and women 3.6 of the types of criminals barred from gun purchases (prob=.000) (See Table 13).²⁰

Finally, 16% report that there was “a time in your household when there was a disagreement about guns in the house.” 15% (or 95% of those reporting a dispute) said that the disagreement was between a man and a woman. In 94% of these disagreements the woman opposed the gun or wanted greater safety measures taken; in only 3% of the cases was the woman pro-gun, and 3% of the time the dispute wasn't pro/anti-gun in nature.

CHILDREN AND GUNS

The presence of children in the household has only limited impact on how people think about and use firearms. First, while the presence of children is not associated with attitudes toward firearms regulation in general (see Table 9), parents are more supportive of two measures specifically mentioning children. 82% of those without children in the home back mandatory childproofing of handguns compared to 89% of parents. 27% of those without children but 32% of parents strongly favor making gun owners liable if a child misuses their weapons. However, the number of children in the household does not appreciably alter parents' attitudes toward support for child-related gun safety measures (i.e., childproofing and owner liability). Second, gun ownership does not vary by the presence of children (Table 6B). Finally, parental opposition to allowing their children to visit in other households having guns does not vary by how many children they have.

²⁰The gender differences on gun control may extend to youths (Carcilli and Lester, 1998).

GUN VIOLENCE AND SAFETY AS PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNS

Physicians are increasingly seeing gun violence as a public health issue and generally support a range of measures to regulate guns and increase gun safety (Price, et al., 1991; Kates, et al., 1995; Grossman, Mang, and Rivara, 1995; Teret and Baker, 1995; Smith, 1996; Haines, 1997; Cassel, et al., 1998; and Hemenway, 1998).²¹

Physicians also support discussing firearm safety with their patients, although many do not regularly carry out such counseling (Smith, 1996). To learn about what the public thinks about the role of physicians regarding firearm safety, people were asked whether health care providers should “counsel patients about safety issues or preventing injuries.” 77% endorsed such safety counseling. Those favoring physician safety counseling were asked whether certain topics should be covered by doctors. 93% favored inclusion in the discussion of the storage of drugs and poisons, 84% bicycle helmets, 83% preventing falls, 81% car seats/seat belts, 75% smoke detectors, and 65% firearms ownership and storage. Overall, this means that 50% support patient safety counseling about guns, 27% support some safety counseling (but not for guns), 22% reject all patient safety counseling, and 1% are unsure.

Among personal gun owners and others in households with guns, 43% approve of patient counseling on guns, while among non-gun households, 55% approve. Among gun-owning households, approval of patient counseling is lowest (38%) if both handguns and longguns are in the household; at 43% for those with only handguns; and at 50% for those only with longguns.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The public supports a wide range of policies designed to regulate firearms, promote gun safety, and keep guns out of the hands of criminals. First, regarding the general regulation of firearms, majorities back all measures except those that call for the outright outlawing of guns or restricting them only to police officers and other authorized persons. Second, support for safety measures is even stronger, with large majorities consistently supporting all safety-related policies, including: 1) technological measures to make guns safer (childproofing, personalizing, magazine safeties, and load indicators); 2) tougher general safety standards for the design and manufacture of guns; 3) mandatory safe-storage requirements; 4) the training of all gun owners; and 5) miscellaneous safety-promoting measures such as holding manufacturers liable

²¹For criticism of the “medicalization” of the gun-control debate, see Kates, Schaffer, Lattimer, Murray, and Cassem, 1995; Kates, Lattimer, and Boen, 1997; and Kleck, 1997.

for defects in design and production. Third, a consensus prevails both that those convicted of various misdemeanors should be prohibited from purchasing guns and that the illegal use of guns should be severely punished. Finally, over the last two years public support for most gun-control measures has risen and the pro-control majority has further solidified.

As Kates (1997) has observed, “most Americans are neither pro- nor anti-gun. I call them pro-control.” Similarly, most people would agree with Hemenway (1998) that “we can remain a nation with many guns yet control our gun-injury problem if we take reasonable steps to make firearms safer and to keep them out of the wrong hands.”

People are willing to pay more taxes to reduce illegal access to firearms and do not think the Second Amendment stands in the way of most proposed policies to regulate guns, increase gun safety, and bar criminals from obtaining guns. People are not ready, however, to, treat guns like tobacco and hold manufacturers liable for injuries that result from firearms.

More Americans believe that a gun reduces rather than enhances safety; most parents are leery of allowing their children around guns; and only a small minority have weapons for self-protection. First, by a narrow 46% to 43% people think a gun in the home reduces safety. Moreover, when asked about six specific events that might occur if a gun was kept in the home, people thought that the negative occurrences (accidental shootings, domestic violence, and worry over gun theft and misuse) were more likely than positive outcomes (less chance of burglary, greater protection from home invaders, a greater sense of security). Also, by 54% to 39.5% (with 7% unsure or in-between), people feel that permissive concealed-carrying laws would lessen rather than increase safety.

Second, parents are very concerned about letting their child go to a household that contains a gun. A majority of parents (68%) approve of a visit only if guns are both locked away and unloaded. Approval falls to 7% if the weapon is not locked away and is loaded.

Third, most Americans do not own a gun for the purpose of protection. 60% do not have a gun in their house, and 23% have a gun but did not acquire it even partially for protection against crime. Only 16% have a gun obtained for the purpose of protection. Likewise, only 9% of Americans have carried a handgun away from home in the last year, and just 5% have carried a weapon for the purpose of self-protection.

Support for gun-control measures (general restrictions, safety enhancements, limitations on criminals) is highest among those not personally owning guns; those more knowledgeable about both the use/misuse of guns and gun-control laws; those concerned about crime and who see crime as increasing; those never ticketed or arrested by the police; women; and those with more confidence in government in general. But support for most gun-control measures is high even among those groups that are less in favor of gun control. In particular, a majority of those who personally own a gun endorse 10 of 17 general regulation policies, 14 of 15 safety measures, and all 7 steps to deny guns to criminals or punish misuse of guns.

Americans appear to back all measures to regulate firearms short of prohibiting guns in general. Just like automobiles are registered, drivers are licensed, and car sales are recorded and documented, people, including most gun owners, believe there should be a set of common-sense regulations to control firearms. Gun safety in particular is a concern of the vast majority of people, and measures from technological innovations to requiring safety training to mandatory safe storage are very popular. Moreover, people's personal and policy preferences are consistent. For example, parents worry about their children being around unsafely stored guns and parents (as well as adults in general) also want laws to require safe storage and to hold owners liable for injuries resulting from unsafe storage. Finally, people want to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and to punish those who misuse guns.

Table 1
Support for General Gun Control Measures^a

Tamper-resistant serial numbers on guns (97-98)	89.6%
Mandatory background check and 5-day waiting period	85.3
Mandatory registration of handguns	85.3
Police permit needed before gun may be purchased	82.0
Require background check for private sales	79.5
Restrict handgun ammunition like handguns themselves	76.8
Keep guns from criminals, even if harder for law-abiding	75.3
Ban all high-capacity ammunition magazines	73.2
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	72.3
Willing to pay \$25 in taxes to reduce gun injuries (97-98)	71.4
Handgun owners must at least be licensed and trained	69.6 ^b
Prohibit import of guns not allowed in country of origin	69.2
Concealed-carrying only for those with special needs	59.8
Prohibit importing guns	55.1
Ban "Saturday night specials"	54.2-58.2 ^c
General concealed-carrying laws make it less safe	53.6
Ban possession of handguns, except police/authorized	38.5
Total ban on handguns	15.6 ^b

Sources: NGPS-98; NGPS-97; GSS-98

^a All results are from the latest, 1998, survey except as marked otherwise.

^b 15.6% wanted a "total ban of handgun ownership" and 54.0% said that "handgun owners should be licensed by the government and complete mandatory training." 69.6% favored licensing or a more stringent measure.

^c See alternative wordings below.

Question Wordings: The police can trace a handgun back to its owner by the serial number. Some criminals and gun traffickers file off serial numbers to avoid this. Serial numbers can be made harder to remove, and this could increase the price of the handgun slightly. How strongly would you favor or oppose a law requiring handgun manufacturers to make serial numbers tamper resistant? (NGPS-97)

Table 1 (continued)

Which of the following would you most favor to regulate the sale of handguns:

- Check on a buyer's criminal record and have a five-day waiting period for buying a handgun.
- Check on a buyer's criminal record instantly and drop the five-day waiting period for buying a handgun.
- Neither check on a buyer's criminal record nor have a five-day waiting period for buying a handgun.

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

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? (GSS-98)

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

Do you think that the sale of handgun ammunition should be subject to the same restrictions and background checks as the sale of handguns?

In 1994, Congress banned the manufacture and sale of new, high-capacity magazines or clips that hold more than 10 rounds of ammunition. People can still buy similar magazines, however, if they were manufactured before the ban. Would you favor or oppose a law that would ban all high-capacity ammunition magazines?

Suppose you were asked to vote for or against additional police patrols. These patrols would target illegal gun dealers and people illegally carrying concealed gun weapons. If this would decrease gunshot injuries by 30%, but you would have to pay \$25/\$100 in additional income taxes each year, would you vote for or against this? (NGPS-97)

For each of the following statements, please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree? 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.

Table 1 (continued)

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

Many of the firearms sold in America are imported from countries that do not allow their own citizens to buy or own the very same guns. Should foreign companies be allowed to sell guns in America that they cannot sell to private citizens in their own country?

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.

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?

Many of the civilian firearms sold in America are imported from abroad. For example, about one-third of the handguns sold to Americans are imported. Should foreign countries be allowed to export guns to America?

Would you favor or oppose a ban on the manufacture in this country of small, easily concealed, and inexpensive handguns? (Wording for first or lower figure in table.)

Would you favor or oppose a ban on the manufacture in this country of small, easily concealed, and inexpensive handguns, often known as Saturday night specials? (Wording for second or higher figure in table.)

Do laws allowing any adult to carry a concealed gun in public, provided they pass a criminal background check and a gun safety course, make you feel more or less safe?

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

Table 2
Support for Gun Safety Measures^a

Require federal handgun safety standards	94.9%
Gun buyers must take gun-safety course	90.1
Federal handgun safety standards even if more expensive	89.8
Require that all new handguns be childproof	87.9
Require that new handguns have magazine safety (97-98)	81.9
Make owners liable for injuries if gun not stored to prevent misuse by children	79.6
Manufacturers liable for injuries from defects in guns (97-98)	79.3
Guns must be stored unloaded	78.4
Guns must be stored with trigger lock	76.8
Current gun owners must take gun-safety course	76.7
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	74.9
Guns must be stored in locked box or cabinet	73.7
Require that all new handguns have load indicator (97-98)	73.2
Require that all new handguns be personalized	69.8-74.5 ^b
Current gun owners who won't take gun-safety course be required to turn in their guns	55.1

Sources: NGPS-98; NGPS-97

^a All results are from the latest, 1998, survey except as marked otherwise.

^b See alternative wordings listed below.

Question Wordings: Handguns made in foreign countries and imported into the United States have to meet certain federal government safety and quality standards. Do you think that handguns made in the United States should or should not have to meet the same standards?

If applying these safety and quality standards made the handguns more expensive, would you still support the standards?

Do you think that mandatory gun-safety training should or should not be required for anyone to buy a gun?

Table 2 (continued)

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 United States to be childproof?

After an ammunition clip or magazine is removed from a pistol, one bullet may remain in the handgun which can still be fired. A magazine safety is a device in some pistols that prevents that bullet from being fired after the magazine or clip is removed. People favoring magazine safeties see them as a way to prevent accidental deaths; others find these devices expensive and unreliable. How strongly would you favor or oppose legislation requiring that new pistols come equipped with a magazine safety? Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose such legislation? (97-98)

Some states have child access prevention laws that subject adults to criminal or civil penalties if they fail to store their firearm to prevent access by children who then use the firearm and death or injury results. Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose a similar national child access prevention law?

Do you think that gun manufacturers should or should not be held financially liable for any death or injury from a defect in the gun's design or manufacture? (97-98)

Do you favor or oppose laws requiring...

That all guns be stored in a locked box or cabinet?

That all guns be stored unloaded?

That all guns be kept with a trigger lock? A trigger lock is an attachment that prevents a gun from being fired until the device around the trigger is unlocked and removed.

What about people who already own guns. Do you think they should or should not be required to take a gun-safety course?

Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose government safety regulations for the design of guns?

A load indicator is a device in some handguns that shows if the handgun contains ammunition. Some people favor them, believing that they will prevent some accidental deaths caused by people who don't know their handgun is loaded; others oppose load indicators for being expensive and unreliable. How strongly do you favor or oppose legislation requiring that all new handguns

Table 2 (continued)

come equipped with a load indicator? Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose such legislation? (97-98)

Engineers are now designing handguns equipped with devices which can recognize the owner of a gun and not fire for anyone else. For 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? (Traditional wording; first number in table)

Engineers are now designing handguns equipped with devices which can recognize the owner of a gun and not fire for anyone else. If a new law were to require all new handguns to be personalized, how strongly would you favor or oppose it? Please tell me if you would strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose it. (Revised wording; second number in table)

If a current gun owner won't take a gun-safety course, should they or should they not be required to turn their guns in to the police?

Table 3 % for Prohibiting Gun Purchases to Criminals	
Convicted of...	
Domestic violence	90.1
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	84.3
Drunk and disorderly conduct (97-98)	83.6
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	80.9
Driving under the influence of alcohol	68.1
Sources: NGPS-98; NGPS-97	

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.

Table 4
Support for Research Spending

	% Favoring More Spending
Research to treat serious diseases, such as cancer and heart disease	75.0
Research to reduce juvenile delinquency	54.7
Research to understand and prevent firearm injuries and deaths	47.3
Research on defense weapons	32.3
Source: NGPS-97	

Question Wording: I'm going to read a list of government sponsored research efforts. For each, please indicate whether you would like to see more or less government spending on research. Remember, if you say 'more', it might require a tax increase to pay for it.

**Table 5
Trends in Attitudes toward Guns**

	1996	1997/98	1998	Change 98 - 96 ^a
A. Support for Gun Control Measures				
Mandatory registration of handguns	81.3%	81.5%	85.3%	+4.0*
Police permit before purchase ^b	80.3	----	82.0	+1.7*
Restrictions on sale of ammunition	----	77.5	76.8	-0.7
Keep guns from criminals, even if harder for law-abiding	78.3	70.1	75.3	-3.0**
Checks on private sales of guns	77.4	----	79.5	+2.1*
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	66.3	62.6	72.3	+6.0**
General concealed-carrying laws make it less safe	55.7	47.4	53.6	-2.1**
Concealed-carrying only for those with special needs	53.5	57.9	59.8	+6.3**
Ban possession of handguns, except police/authorized	35.2	36.1	38.5	+3.3*
Total ban on handguns	16.1	16.5	15.6	-0.5*
B. Support for Gun Safety Measures and Beliefs				
Require federal handgun safety standards	----	93.6	94.9	+1.3*
Federal handgun safety standards even if more expensive	----	85.7	89.8	+4.1*
Require that all new handguns be childproof	85.8	87.5	87.9	+2.1**
Require that all new handguns be personalized	68.0	71.4	69.8	+1.8**
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	74.6	67.8	74.9	+0.3**
Home less safe with handgun	43.4	45.4	46.4	+3.0**
C. Prohibiting Gun Purchases to Criminals Convicted of...				
Domestic violence	----	89.2	90.1	+0.9*
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	77.9	84.5	80.9	+3.0*
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	85.4	82.9	84.3	-1.1
Driving under the influence of alcohol	63.1	70.6	68.1	+5.0**
Sources: NGPS-96, NGPS97-98, NGPS-98, GSS-94-98 Question Wording: See Tables 1-3. ^a Change in 1998-1997 when not asked in 1996. ^b GSS. Support for requiring a police permit grew from 77.9% in 1994 to 82.0% in 1998, prob.=.002. * Overall change in distribution significant at .05-.002. ** Overall change in distribution significant at .001 or less.				

**Table 6
Levels and Distribution of Gun Ownership and Purchases**

A. Levels	%
Have gun in household	37.8
Respondent owns gun	25.4
Other person owns gun	13.3
No guns in household	61.7 ^a
Have handgun in household	23.1
Respondent owns handgun	15.8
No gun in household	61.3 ^a
Handgun only	6.0
Longgun only	14.5
Both types of guns	17.8
Bought handgun	20.3
Never bought handgun	78.5
Refused, etc.	1.2
^a Two numbers (61.3, 61.7) differ slightly because of a few missing cases being excluded from second number.	

Table 6
Levels and Distribution of Gun Ownership and Purchases (continued)

B. Ownership by Socio-Demographics	Gun in Household,%	Handgun in Household,%	Personally Owns Gun,%
Gender			
Men	43.1	27.5	42.3
Women	33.0**	18.9*	9.8**
Region			
Northeast	24.3	15.1	14.2
Midwest	34.4	17.6	23.6
South	46.4	28.9	32.4
West	39.8**	26.6*	25.9**
Marital Status			
Married	48.7	29.3	31.6
Divorced	25.7	18.5	20.8
Separated	29.8	18.3	13.0
Widowed	18.4	10.0	15.6
Never Married	20.8**	12.7**	14.6**
Education Level			
Less than High School	35.2	13.5	23.9
High School	40.2	24.9	28.5
College	38.4	25.3	23.9
Greater than College	33.6	24.7	25.6
Annual Income			
\$0-9,999	21.8	8.6	19.7
\$10,000-19,999	25.4	12.6	16.5
\$20,000-29,999	35.5	22.0	29.1
\$30,000-39,999	41.8	28.0	27.0
\$40,000-49,999	46.4	27.9	28.7
\$50,000-59,999	50.9	28.1	32.2
\$60,000-79,999	46.8	25.7	29.5
\$80,000+	36.7**	25.9*	24.0**

Table 6
Levels and Distribution of Gun Ownership and Purchases (continued)

B. Ownership by Socio-Demographics	Gun in Household,%	Handgun in Household,%	Personally Owns Gun,%
Age			
Less than 30 years	31.3	18.1	19.5
30-39 years	32.6	21.6	22.1
40-49 years	39.4	18.4	25.2
50-65 years	54.4	39.4	35.8
65+ years	33.9**	19.5**	26.5**
Number of Children in Home			
0 children	39.4	24.9	27.4
1 child	39.7	24.1	26.3
2 children	37.6	20.3	21.4
3 children	25.7	17.4	16.3
4+ children	32.9	14.5	23.6
Source: NGPS-98			
* Overall differences in means significant at .05-.002.			
** Overall differences in means significant at .001 or less.			

Table 7
Source of Handguns^a

Purchased at a retail outlet that specializes in gun sales	34.0%
Purchased at a retail outlet that sells guns and other merchandise, such as sporting goods or a department store	18.6
Ordered through the mail	1.7
Purchased from a pawnshop	6.1
Purchased locally from a person who doesn't own a retail gunshop	7.6
Purchased from a relative	4.3
Purchased from a friend	10.6
Given as a gift	11.8
Inherited	9.7
Borrowed	0.2
Purchased at a gun show	2.0
Given as part of police work	1.6
Given as part of employment	1.2
Purchased, don't know where	1.4
Miscellaneous	3.6 ^b
Not mentioned or don't know how obtained	14.3

Source: NGPS-98

^a Percentages based on number of households with handgun. Percentages total to more than 100% because some people with more than one handgun obtained their guns from different sources.

^b Traded (2), spouse's gun (2), took from brother (1), military (1), raffle (1), left by relative (1), found after bar fight (1), auction (1).

**Table 8
Ownership of Guns**

A. Trends in Gun Ownership - Overall			
	% of Adults in Households with Guns	% of Households with Guns	% of Adults Personally Owning a 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	40.7	28.5
1996a	43.4	40.2	27.2
1996b	42.3	39.1	30.8
1997	38.6	38.4	28.7
1998a	36.8	34.9	22.5
1998b	37.8	37.4	25.4

**Table 8
Ownership of Guns (continued)**

B. Trends in Gun Ownership - Type of Firearm		
	% of Adults in Household 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
1997	24.0	31.1
1998a	20.7	29.0
1998b	23.1	31.9

Sources: GSS, 1973-1996a, 1998a; NGPS-96, 1996b; NGPS 97-98, 1997; NGPS-98, 1998

**Table 9
Attitudes toward Guns by Gun Ownership**

	Personally Owns Gun	Gun in Household	No Gun in Household	No Gun Minus Personally Owns Gun	Probability ^a
A. Firearm Regulations					
Tamper-resistant serial numbers on guns (97-98)	85.4%	91.8%	92.5%	+7.1	.004
Mandatory background check and 5-day waiting period	81.9	90.6	85.9	+4 .0	.037
Mandatory registration of handguns	74.7	92.3	89.0	+14.3	.000
Require background check for private sales	65.9	88.8	83.9	+18.0	.000
Restrict handgun ammunition like handguns themselves	59.0	85.2	84.0	+25.0	.000
Keep guns from criminals, even if harder for law-abiding	59.8	76.7	83.5	+26.3	.000
Ban all high-capacity ammunition magazines	59.9	82.6	77.0	+17.1	.000
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	49.1	81.7	80.8	+31.7	.000
Willing to pay taxes to reduce gun injuries (97-98)	61.9	69.8	69.0	+7.1	.165

**Table 9
Attitudes toward Guns by Gun Ownership (continued)**

	Personally Owns Gun	Gun in Household	No Gun in Household	No Gun Minus Personally Owns Gun	Probability ^a
A. Firearm Regulations (continued)					
Handgun owners must at least be licensed and trained	41.2	69.2	82.9	+41.7	.000
Prohibit import of guns not allowed in the country of origin	53.3	81.3	74.7	+21.4	.000
Concealed-carrying only for those with special needs	37.4	58.5	71.0	+33.6	.000
Prohibit importing guns	43.4	64.3	59.5	+16.1	.001
Ban "Saturday night specials"	50.8	58.6	59.1	+8.3	.262
General concealed-carrying laws make it less safe	34.7	56.4	61.8	+27.1	.000
Ban possession of handguns, except police/authorized	10.3	30.5	53.2	+42.9	.000
Total ban on handguns	4.2	8.2	22.5	+18.3	.000

**Table 9
Attitudes toward Guns by Gun Ownership (continued)**

	Personally Owns Gun	Gun in Household	No Gun in Household	No Gun Minus Personally Owns Gun	Probability ^a
B. Gun Safety Measures					
Federal handgun safety standards like imports	92.2	96.0	96.2	+3.8	.021
Gun buyers must take gun-safety course	85.1	89.5	93.0	+7.9	.002
Federal handgun safety standards even if more expensive	88.8	95.1	89.5	+1.3	.015
Require that all new handguns be childproof	80.8	97.3	90.1	+9.3	.000
Require that new handguns have magazine safety (97-98)	74.5	84.4	85.7	+11.2	.003
Make owners liable for injuries if gun not stored to prevent misuse by children	69.5	83.1	83.9	+14.4	.000
Manufacturers liable for injuries from defects in guns (97-98)	80.8	80.4	78.5	-2.3	.902
Guns must be stored unloaded	63.5	81.1	85.7	+22.2	.000
Guns must be stored with trigger lock	55.8	83.8	85.4	+19.6	.000

Table 9
Attitudes toward Guns by Gun Ownership (continued)

	Personally Owns Gun	Gun in Household	No Gun in Household	No Gun Minus Personally Owns Gun	Probability ^a
B. Gun Safety Measures (continued)					
Current gun owners must take gun-safety course	62.4	75.2	83.4	+21.0	.000
Require that all new handguns have load indicator (97-98)	59.4	78.6	79.0	+19.6	.000
Guns must be stored in locked box or cabinet	54.1	75.9	82.9	+18.8	.000
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	63.2	78.9	77.8	+14.5	.000
Require that all new handguns be personalized	58.6	77.8	77.6	+19.0	.000
Current gun owners who won't take gun-safety course be required to turn in their guns	28.1	49.8	68.7	+40.6	.000

Table 9
Attitudes toward Guns by Gun Ownership (continued)

	Personally Owns Gun	Gun in Household	No Gun in Household	No Gun Minus Personally Owns Gun	Probability ^a
C. Guns and Criminals					
Domestic violence	79.9	96.0	93.7	+13.8	.000
Drunk and disorderly conduct (97-98)	73.1	85.7	88.5	+15.4	.000
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	71.2	87.6	90.6	+19.4	.000
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	69.5	86.8	84.9	+15.4	.000
Driving under the influence of alcohol	56.7	67.6	73.3	+16.6	.001
Illegal gun possession a serious crime	81.0	87.9	85.8	+4.8	.247
Double punishment for using gun in crime	84.8	84.1	80.6	-4.2	.063
D. Safety and Miscellaneous					
Less safe if gun in home	13.9	33.6	64.2	+50.3	.000
No visit if gun unloaded and locked away	13.0	16.1	41.6	+28.6	.000
No visit if gun loaded but locked away	35.9	57.1	70.3	+34.4	.000
No visit if gun loaded and unlocked	79.9	96.9	95.6	+15.7	.000
No guest with gun in household (97-98)	43.7	68.4	72.2	+28.5	.000
Health care provider should talk to patients about gun safety	43.1	43.3	55.4	+12.3	.003

Sources: NGPS-98; NGPS-97

^a Probability levels are based on the entire distributions, not just the proportions displayed above.

Question Wordings: See preceding tables.

Table 10
Attitudes toward Guns by Socio-Demographics

Gender	General Firearm Regulation	Gun Safety Measures	Barring Guns to Criminals
Men	7.8	7.9	2.9
Women	9.0**	9.2**	3.6**
Region			
Northeast	9.1	9.2	3.3
Midwest	8.5	8.6	3.2
South	8.1	8.5	3.3
West	8.4**	8.3**	3.1*
Marital Status			
Married	8.4	8.5	3.2
Divorced	8.1	8.6	3.3
Separated	8.5	8.5	3.1
Widowed	8.6	8.3	3.6
Never Married	8.6	9.0*	3.2**
Education Level			
Less than High School	8.0	8.5	3.4
High School	8.1	8.6	3.2
College	8.6	8.6	3.2
Greater than College	9.2**	8.5	3.2*
Annual Income			
\$0-9,999	8.6	8.7	3.7
\$10,000-19,999	8.6	9.0	3.5
\$20,000-29,999	7.7	8.6	3.3
\$30,000-39,999	8.6	8.6	3.2
\$40,000-49,999	8.2	9.0	3.1
\$50,000-59,999	8.5	8.9	3.2
\$60,000-79,999	8.7	8.7	3.1
\$80,000+	8.6*	8.0	3.1*

Table 10
Attitudes toward Guns by Socio-Demographics (continued)

Age	General Firearm Regulation	Gun Safety Measures	Barring Guns to Criminals
Less than 30 years	8.5	9.0	3.2
30-39 years	8.3	8.8	3.1
40-49 years	8.8	8.7	3.1
50-65 years	8.0	8.1	3.2
65+ years	8.4	8.4**	3.6**
Number of Children in Home			
0 children	8.4	8.4	3.3
1 child	8.5	8.8	3.1
2 children	8.7	9.0	3.2
3 children	8.3	8.9	3.1
4+ children	8.1	8.8	3.1

Source: NGPS-98

* Overall differences in means significant at .05-.002.

** Overall differences in means significant at .001 or less.

Table 11
Knowledge about Guns and Gun Laws^a

Item	% Correct
Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements?	
a. First-time gun owners can learn what is needed about their new guns by reading the manufacturer's instruction manual. (Disagree)	67.7
b. Always keep a gun unloaded until ready to use. (Agree)	85.4
c. Most murders don't involve guns. (Disagree)	63.3
Do you think that guns manufactured in the United States are or are not currently regulated by federal safety standards? (Not)	29.0
Do you think your state has a law or court ruling that makes the gun owner guilty of a crime if a child finds the gun and injures someone with it? (Correctly identifies that lives in a state with or without such law/ruling.) ^b	41.5
^a Question wording is followed by the correct response in parentheses. ^b The Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research supplied a list of states covered by such laws/rulings. Respondents were grouped into covered and uncovered states and their responses were scored as correct or incorrect.	

Table 12
Impact on Safety of Guns in the Home

	% indicating that gun promotes safety
Having a gun in the house reduces the chance of being burglarized (agree)	19.9
Having a gun in the house increases the chance of domestic violence (disagree)	43.9
Having a gun in the house allows people to better protect themselves from home invaders (agree)	60.2
Having a gun in the house increases the chance of someone accidentally being shot (disagree)	14.9
Having a gun in the house provides people with a sense of security (agree)	72.7
Having a gun in the house means that its owners always have to worry about it being stolen or misused (disagree)	27.4

Source: NGPS-98

Question wording: Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements?

**Table 13
Gender Differences in Gun Attitudes and Behaviors**

	Men	Women	Probability^a
A. Firearm Regulations			
Tamper-resistant serial numbers on guns (97-98)	87.6%	91.4%	.000
Mandatory background check and 5-day waiting period	81.2	89.1	.000
Mandatory registration of handguns	81.8	88.8	.003
Require background check for private sales	72.4	86.2	.000
Restrict handgun ammunition like handguns themselves	66.3	86.5	.000
Keep guns from criminals, even if harder for law-abiding	68.9	81.2	.000
Ban all high-capacity ammunition magazines	64.5	81.3	.000
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	62.6	81.3	.000
Willing to pay taxes to reduce gun injuries (97-98)	64.6	68.7	.107
Handgun owners must at least be licensed and trained	57.3	80.9	.000
Prohibit import of guns not allowed in the country of origin	55.4	82.0	.000
Concealed-carrying only for those with special needs	50.7	68.1	.000
Prohibit importing guns	42.5	66.8	.000
Ban "Saturday night specials"	55.6	57.2	.170
General concealed-carrying laws make it less safe	44.4	62.1	.000
Ban possession of handguns, except police/authorized	26.1	50.0	.000
Total ban on handguns	12.1	18.7	.000

**Table 13
Gender Differences in Gun Attitudes and Behaviors (continued)**

	Men	Women	Probability^a
B. Gun Safety Measures			
Federal handgun safety standards like imports	93.5%	96.3%	.025
Gun buyers must take gun-safety course	87.1	92.8	.005
Federal handgun safety standards even if more expensive	89.4	90.1	.067
Require that all new handguns be childproof	82.6	92.8	.000
Require that new handguns have magazine safety (97-98)	78.8	84.9	.001
Make owners liable for injuries if gun not stored to prevent misuse by children	75.1	83.7	.000
Manufacturers liable for injuries from defects in guns (97-98)	78.8	79.7	.337
Guns must be stored unloaded	71.1	85.3	.000
Guns must be stored with trigger lock	66.9	85.9	.000
Current gun owners must take gun-safety course	71.7	81.2	.002
Require that all new handguns have load indicator (97-98)	65.6	80.1	.000
Guns must be stored in locked box or cabinet	62.6	84.0	.000
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	69.0	80.4	.000
Require that all new handguns be personalized	67.4	76.7	.000
Current gun owners who won't take gun-safety course be required to turn in their guns	45.0	64.6	.000

Table 13
Gender Differences in Gun Attitudes and Behaviors (continued)

	Men	Women	Probability ^a
C. Guns and Criminals			
Domestic violence, not by gun	83.0%	96.6%	.000
Drunk and disorderly conduct (97-98)	76.4	90.2	.000
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	77.3	90.7	.000
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	70.8	90.2	.000
Driving under the influence of alcohol	55.8	79.5	.000
Illegal gun possession a serious crime	81.4	87.8	.019
Double punishment for using gun in crime	82.3	82.1	.001
D. Safety and Miscellaneous			
Less safe if gun in home	37.8	54.6	.000
No visit if gun unloaded and locked away	22.8	38.5	.000
No visit if gun loaded but locked away	49.3	70.5	.000
No visit if gun loaded and unlocked	88.1	95.9	.001
No guest with gun in household (97-98)	51.1	74.7	.000
Health care provider should talk to patients about gun safety	46.5	53.4	.044

Table 13
Gender Differences in Gun Attitudes and Behaviors (continued)

	Men	Women	Probability ^a
E. Ownership and Behaviors			
Has gun in household	43.1%	33.0%	.001
Personally owns gun(s)	42.3	9.8	.000
Ever bought handgun	33.6	8.0	.000
Have gun for protection (gun owners only)	42.6	34.4	.106
Carried gun away from home in last year	14.6	4.5	.000
Carried gun for protection (gun carriers only)	55.3	61.6	.046
Sources: NGPS-98; NGPS-97 Question Wordings: See previous tables. ^a Probability levels are based on the entire distributions, not just the proportions displayed above.			

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