

**1997-98
National Gun Policy Survey
of the National Opinion Research Center:
Research Findings**

Tom W. Smith

National Opinion Research Center
University of Chicago

September 1998



INTRODUCTION

Each year gun violence exacts a staggering toll on American society. Consider the following:

- ▶ In 1994-1996, 34,000-39,000 deaths and over 100,000 non-fatal injuries per annum were 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 10-24 and the third leading cause of death for persons 25-34 (National Center, 1996).
- ▶ Firearm injuries cost over \$20 billion a year in medical, disability, and related expenses (Max and Rice, 1993).
- ▶ Over 70% of murders are committed with a firearm (National Center, 1996).
- ▶ The United States leads the industrialized world in the level of gun-related deaths (House, 1996; "Guns," 1996; United Nations, 1997).

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

- 1) The public's views on the regulation of firearms including attitudes towards a) general gun control measures, b) measures aimed at promoting gun safety, c) the denial of gun purchases to certain types of criminals, d) willingness to pay for specific anti-gun violence programs, and e) how attitudes have changed over time;
- 2) Gun ownership including a) the prevalence and distribution of firearms, b) the practice of carrying weapons away from home, c) the possibility of ever buying a handgun, and d) trends in gun ownership;
- 3) The connection between gun ownership and attitudes towards firearms;
- 4) Socio-demographic differences in attitudes toward firearms;
- 5) Crime, government, and firearm safety knowledge and attitudes towards firearms;
- 6) The use of firearms for protection against crime;
- 7) Safety issues related to firearms including a) the perceived safety that guns provide, b) concerns about being around guns, c) the impact of various

possible events on one's likelihood of keeping a handgun, d) knowledge about gun safety, and e) reasons why people do not own guns;

8) The relation between gender and firearms; and

9) Gun safety as a public health concern.

This report primarily utilizes data from 1) the 1997-98 National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS-98) and 2) the 1996 National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS-96) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago in collaboration with the Center for Gun Policy and Research of Johns Hopkins University with funding from the Joyce Foundation of Chicago. Supplemental data comes from the 1972-1996 General Social Survey (GSS) of NORC.

The NGPS-96 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 and from November 8, 1997 to January 27, 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 and Woolley, Kuby, and Shin, 1998. 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, 1996. Full technical details are presented in Davis and Smith, 1996.

THE REGULATION OF FIREARMS

Broad public support exists for the regulation of firearms (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; Flanagan and Longmire, 1996; Blendon, et al., 1996; Schuldt, et al.; Carter, 1997; and Smith, 1997). Substantial majorities back most general measures for controlling guns, policies to increase gun safety, and laws prohibiting criminals from purchasing firearms. Moreover, the public favors more spending and even more taxes for specific programs to reduce gun violence. In general, people endorse all measures to control guns and reduce gun violence, except for those that call for a blanket prohibition on owning guns.

General Gun Control Measures

First, as Table 1 indicates, majorities support 8 of 11 general measures to regulate guns. 90% favor requiring that serial numbers on guns be tamper resistant. 82% endorse the mandatory registration of handguns and 63% also want mandatory registration of longguns (rifles and shotguns). 78% believe that the sale of handgun ammunition should be regulated the same as the sale of handguns.

71% are willing to pay more taxes to increase police patrols to reduce gun injuries. 70% 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." 64% back the idea that all handgun owners should at least be licensed and trained in the use of their weapons. 58% favor allowing concealed carry permits only for those with special needs such as private detectives.

In addition, a plurality of 47% believe that laws allowing any adult who passes a criminal background check and a gun-safety course to carry a concealed gun in public makes things less safe. 41% feel that such permissive or shall-issue concealed carrying laws makes things safer (9% neither more nor less safe and 2% don't know).

Plurality support is lacking only for measures that call for the general prohibition of guns. 36% support restricting the possession of handguns to "the police and other authorized persons" and only 17% want a "total ban on handguns."

To look at people's summary views on the general, gun-control measures a scale was made that went from 0 for someone who rejected all ten of the measures in Table 1 to a score of 10 for someone who accepted all 10 measures.¹ This scale shows that on average people approved of 6.1 of the 10 measures.

Safety-Related, Gun-Control Measures

Second, 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 (Table 2). 94% favor having handguns manufactured in the US meet the same safety and quality standards that imported handguns must meet and 86% endorse this position even if it would make handguns more expensive. 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. 79% are for making manufacturers liable for any injuries that result from defects in the design or manufacturing of guns. 73% favor having all new handguns come with a load indicator to show if the weapon is loaded or not. 71% back having all new handguns be personalized so that only the owner of a weapon will be able to fire the gun. 68% want the federal government to regulate the safety design of guns.

¹There are 11 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.

In sum, substantial majorities consistently support both all proposed specific, technological measures to make guns safer (childproofing, personalizing, magazine safeties, and load indicators), tougher general safety standards for the design and manufacture of guns, and other safety-promoting measure such as holding manufacturers liable for defects in design and production. 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 seven items in Table 2 to 7 for someone who backed each safety proposal.² On average people supported 5.5 of the 7 safety-related measures.

Denial of Gun Purchases to Criminals

Third, people want to keep guns out of the hands of criminals (Table 3). Currently state laws typically restrict convicted felons from legally purchasing guns, but most states allow most of those convicted of misdemeanors to buy guns. The public is however much less willing to let those convicted of a variety of less serious crimes purchase firearms. 89% want to prevent those convicted of domestic violence from buying guns and disapproval is 85% for those who committed simple assault, 84% for those guilty of being drunk and disorderly, 83% for those who illegally carried a concealed weapon without a permit, and 71% for those who drove a car while intoxicated. 56% wanted to prohibit all five types of criminals from being able to buy a gun or on average people supported prohibition for 4.1 of these five crimes.

Willingness to Pay for Anti-Gun Violence Measures

Fourth, when it comes to fighting gun violence, people are willing to put their money where their opinions are. As Table 4 shows, 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. 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.

Willingness to pay for the amelioration of gun violence was also examined by asking people what they would pay for "additional police patrols" to "target illegal gun dealers and people illegally carrying concealed gun weapons" in order to achieve a 30% decrease in gunshot injuries. Moreover, in order to test how sensitive people were to the specific price tag associated with these anti-gun crime patrols, half were asked if they would back a program that added \$25 to

²There are 8 questions in Table 8, 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 first combined into a single item to construct the gun safety scale.

their annual income tax and the other half were asked if they would pay \$100 in additional taxes. Support for this program was strong in both cases. 71.4% were willing to pay \$25 and 62.6% \$100 in additional taxes. Next, people were asked "What is the largest additional yearly tax payment you would vote for in order to reduce gunshot injuries by 30%?" Among those asked about paying \$25 more, people on average were willing to vote for \$58 in additional taxes. For those first asked about paying \$100 more, they were on average willing to pay \$113. Under both conditions people are willing to pay an appreciable increase in their taxes to increase anti-gun violence measures and reduce gun injuries. The significant difference in average willingness to pay by the initial suggested price indicates that people's purchase price is not fixed, but can be altered by the cost initially put on the policy.

In addition, a willingness to accept a financial cost for extending firearms regulations shows up in several of the questions discussed above in Tables 1 and 2. For example, the items on tampering with serial numbers and on extending the safety and quality that apply to imports to domestically manufactured guns mention that these measures may increase costs. In each case support was strong despite the mentioning of higher costs. For example, 92% of those favoring applying import standards to domestic guns still favored this even if this made handguns more expensive.

Trends in Attitudes towards the Regulation of Firearms

Fifth, since 1996 support for gun control has generally remained strong and reasonably stable (Table 5). Of the 7 general regulation items that were asked both in 1996 and in 1997-98, there were statistically significant declines in support for three items (seeing permissive concealed carry laws as less safe, thinking the government should keep guns away from criminals even if this made it harder for law-abiding citizens, and mandatory registration of longguns), one item gained significant support (giving concealed carry permits only to those with special needs), and three showed no significant change or a mixed direction (total ban on guns, mandatory registration of handguns, and restricting guns to the police and authorized persons).

On the four safety-related items asked in both years, three gained ground (childproofing, personalizing guns, and believing that guns make homes less safe) and one item showed a decline (wanting the federal government to regulate the safety design of firearms).

On the three criminal prohibition items asked over time, significantly more people wanted to deny guns to those convicted of drunk driving and simple assault and there was no change in attitudes toward illegal gun carrying.

Of the 14 trends there was pro-gun control movement on six items, an anti-gun control shift on four items, and no significant, directional change on four items.

There was a shift of support towards safety-related items and items restricting criminals and away from general regulation measures. Overall, support for gun control remained high and fairly stable with slightly more trends for control than against it.

GUN OWNERSHIP

The Prevalence and Distribution of Firearms

The personal ownership of firearms in the United States is more widespread than in any other nation in the world. As Table 6A indicates, about 39% of households have a gun and 24% contain a handgun. Longguns are more common than handguns with 16% of households having only the former and 6% just the latter. In addition 19% of households have both longguns and handguns. 29% of respondents personally own a gun (as opposed to merely living in a household with a gun) and 18% personally own a handgun. In addition, 25% have bought a handgun. Looking at both handgun purchases and the possession of handguns indicates that 34% of adults have had contact with handguns (15% have both bought a handgun and have a handgun in their household; 9% did not buy, but live with a handgun, and 10% have purchased, but do not currently possess a handgun).

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

1. Both household and personal ownership is greater among men than women.
2. Ownership is lowest in the Northeast, intermediate in the West, and highest in the South and Midwest. Handgun ownership is, however, highest in the South and intermediate in the Midwest and West (but this difference is not statistically significant).
3. The married are most likely to have guns in general, with the ownership next highest among the divorced and separated. However, the divorced are the most likely to have a handgun in their households. The widowed and never married are the least likely to have a weapon.
4. Gun ownership does not vary greatly by educational level. Personal and household ownership is slightly, but not significantly, lower for those with more than a college degree.
5. 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.

6. Gun ownership is highest for the middle aged. 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.
7. Households with 1-2 children under 18 are somewhat, but not significantly, more likely to contain guns than households with no children or 3 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 makes older men, living in rural areas the mostly likely to both have guns in their households and to personally own a firearm. Women in urban areas and with low incomes are least likely to possess firearms.

Carrying Firearms Away from Home

While about 39% of households contain a gun and 24% have a handgun, only about 11-12% of adults have carried a gun away from home during the last year.³ The rate of carrying guns can be estimated from two items. First, as part of an anti-crime battery (described below) 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.⁴

People carry handguns away from home for various reasons. The most common reason (9% of all or 72% of those carrying a gun) was going to a firing range or for target practice. This was followed by personal protection (7/62%), hunting (5/38%), work-related (2/22%), and other (1/11%). Many people carried a handgun for more than one reason, with people on average mentioning two reasons. Among gun carriers 51% cited both protection and another reason, 38% mentioned only other reasons, and 11% gave protection as their only reason. 33% of those with both a longgun and handgun, 28% of those with only a handgun, and 10% of those with only a longgun carried a gun away from home for the purpose of protection.

³See also the Oregon estimates in Nelson, et al., 1996.

⁴The 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.

Handgun carriers are quite variable in how often they report taking a handgun away from home. 20% report carrying a handgun almost daily, 11% several times a week to weekly, 8% several times a month, 11% about once a month, 32% several times a year, 17% only once, and 1% were unsure. On average this converts to carriers having handguns on the streets on 64 days a year. In turn, this means that on a given day about 1 of every 48 adults will carry a handgun.

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. 84% of those who carry a handgun about once a week or more often usually have it loaded while only 34% of those who carry it less than weekly have it loaded. Those who carry a gun for protection are also more likely to have it loaded. 68% of those carrying for protect usually have it loaded, while only 20% of those who carry it only for other reasons have it loaded.

Just over two-fifths (42%) of handgun carriers have a permit for carrying a handgun. Most of them have had the permit for more than five years. Permits are more common among frequent handgun carriers (weekly+=51%; less than weekly=37%); among those who carry it for protection (for protection=50%; not for protection=28%); and among those who have multiple reasons for carrying a handgun (1 reason=27%; 2 reasons=43%, 3+ reasons=57%).

Ever Likely to Purchase Handgun

Those without handguns (i.e. who had never bought a handgun and do not currently own a handgun) were asked how likely they thought it would be that they would ever buy a handgun. 22% thought it likely, 73% unlikely, and 5% were in between, unsure, or didn't answer. Combined together with current ownership status this means that 24-25% live in a household with a handgun, 15% don't currently have, but say they are likely to acquire a handgun, and 1% might buy a gun. Thus, if all likely purchasers did buy a gun (while current owners retained theirs), then 40-41% of households would possess handguns, as many or more than now have any kind of firearm.

Trends in Gun Ownership

The proportion of households with a firearm has been in slow decline over the last quarter century (Table 7). In the early 1970s about 50% of adults lived in households that kept a firearm. This may now have fallen to below 40%. However, this decline is partly the result of a decrease in household size. Since 1980 the proportion of adults personally owning a gun has held steady at about 29%.

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

perhaps as low as 31% today.⁵ 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. In addition, the proportion ever having bought a handgun increased from 21% in 1996 to 25% in 1997-98.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN GUN OWNERSHIP AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS 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 8 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, in all but 4 of the 36 comparisons there are 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 35 cases and in all 32 cases where there are statistically significant differences, people who personally own gun are more pro-gun (i.e. less for regulation, less concerned about safety issues) than those without guns.⁶ Besides being pervasive these differences are often quite strong. In 17 cases the gap is 20 percentage points or more.

Third, in most cases 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 one instance others in gun households are more supportive of the regulation of firearms and more concerned about their safety than those who personally own guns. In six cases they are even marginally more pro-gun control than those from households without guns.

These patterns of course also show up on the three regulation scales. On the general firearm regulation scale personal owners back 4.7 measures, others in gun households support 6.1 items, and those in non-gun household approve

⁵It is likely that the NGPS-98 figure slightly underestimates the longgun ownership level. Based on the 1973-1996 GSS trend we would expect a figure of about 33-34% in 1998. Results from the 1998 GSS later this year will test this projection.

⁶The one exception (i.e. the sole negative difference score in Table 7) is that 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.

of 6.8 items. Similarly, personal owners favor 5.1 safety measures, and others in gun households and those without guns both are for 5.7 proposals. Likewise, personal owners want to bar 3.6 types of criminals from buying guns compared to 4.2 for others in gun households, and 4.4 among those in non-gun households.

Fourth, among non-handgun owners even an intention of purchasing a handgun is associated with less support for the regulation of firearms. On the general regulation scale 4.5 measures are supported by handguns owners, 5.8 by non-owners living in a household with a handgun, 5.5 by people without handguns who are likely to buy a handgun, and 6.9 by those unlikely to buy a handgun. On the gun-safety scale 4.9 measures are backed by handgun owners, 5.2 by non-owners living in a household with a handgun, 5.5 by people likely to buy a handgun, and 5.7 by those unlikely to buy a handgun. On the barring criminals scale 3.5 measures are supported by handguns owners, 4.3 by non-owners living in a household with a handgun, 3.7 by people likely to buy a handgun, and 4.4 by those unlikely to buy a handgun.

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 5 of the 11 general regulation measures, all 7 safety policies, and all 5 types of criminals, a majority of those who personally own guns favor the restriction of firearms. For example, 58% of those who personally own guns want the sale of handgun ammunition regulated like handguns themselves, 72% favor the mandatory registration of handguns, 79% endorse childproofing handguns, and 73% want to deny guns to the drunk and disorderly. 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.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS 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 towards the regulation of firearms (Table 9). The key patterns are as follows:

1. Residents of the Northeast are the most supportive of general regulation, safety-related measures, and barring criminals from purchasing guns. Those in the West are the least in favor of these policies.
2. Marital status does not make a great difference. The widowed are most for general regulation and prohibiting guns to criminals, but are the least likely to endorse safety-related measures

3. Those with a graduate-level education are more likely to back general firearm regulations and safety-related policies, but are not distinctive in their views on keeping criminals from buying guns.
4. Income is not related to general firearm regulation attitudes. Gun-safety policies are marginally less supported by the lowest income earners, but those with low incomes are the most supportive of prohibiting criminals from buying guns.
5. Support for general and safety-related measures is highest among the youngest adults, but restricting criminals is most backed by the oldest adults.
6. Number of children in the household is unrelated to firearm attitudes.

CRIME, GOVERNMENT, AND FIREARM KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS FIREARMS

Concerns about crime were measured by an open-ended question in which people were asked what was the most important problem facing the country and an agree/disagree item that asked people if "lived in a safe area and personally have a very low chance of being shot." On the most important problem item 33% mentioned crime and violence, 16% drugs, and 4% guns. 48% 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 5.8 general regulations, those mentioning one problem favored 6.3 policies, and those citing two or more problems supported 7.1 measures. For the safety scale the pattern was similar: no mentions 5.25 measures, one mention 5.6, and 2+ mentions 6.1. For barring criminals from getting guns it was no mentions=3.9, one mention=4.35, 2+ mentions=4.5. On the personal safety from gun violence item, 70% said they were safe, 5% were unsure, and 25% disagreed that they lived in a safe, low-risk area. 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.⁷

Attitudes toward the government were measured by asking people whether they agreed or disagreed that "taxes are too high," "government programs are usually

⁷On the relationship between crime, fear of crime, and gun control attitudes see Smith, 1980; Stinchcombe, et al., 1980; Kleck, 1996. On neighborhood factors see McClain, 1983.

effective," and "government does too many things already." A scale was made that ran from 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 to 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 5.0 general measures compared to 5.5 for those with low support for government action, 6.3 for those with medium attitudes, and 6.9 for high government-action sentiments. Likewise, the very low government-action people favored 5.0 safety policies followed by 5.4 for the lows, 5.5 for the mediums, and 5.7 for the highs. Similarly, the very low anti-government group wants to bar 3.7 types of criminals from buying guns while the figures for the high were 4.0, the medium 4.2 and the high 4.3. Thus, a general skepticism towards government action reduces support for programs that call for more government regulations.

Knowledge about safety (described below) has a mixed and curvilinear impact on attitudes towards the regulation of firearms. Support for general regulation measures is highest among those knowing more about gun safety (for 6.7 items), lowest for those with partial knowledge (5.7), and next highest for those with low knowledge (6.4). Similarly, the more knowledgeable are more for denying guns to more types of criminals (4.4), followed by the less informed (4.3), and then by those with intermediate knowledge (3.9). For gun-safety policies the same pattern appears (high=5.6; low=5.5; intermediate=5.4), but the differences are not statistically significant.

PROTECTION AGAINST CRIME

Most people took multiple precautions during the last year to protect themselves against crime. Out of a list of 10 possible anti-crime measures people on average took 3.6 measures. As Table 10 indicates, locking doors was the most common measure taken (94%) and carrying a gun away from home was the least common (11%). People were then asked what measure of those they had taken did they consider the "most effective in protecting yourself from crime." Acting more aware or cautious was the first choice (41%) followed by locking doors (24.5%). All other precautions were much less frequently mentioned. Keeping a gun at home was listed as 6th most effective (4.5%) and carrying a gun away from home as 9th most effective (1.5%). Even among those who used guns for anti-crime protection, few judged firearms as especially effective. While 51% of those mentioning that they had become more aware and cautious to avoid crime considered this as their most effective protection, only 13.6% of those carrying a gun and 13.4% of those keeping a gun at home judged these as their most

effective move. This placed guns as relatively 8th and 9th in terms of perceived effectiveness, exceeding only carrying mace (which was considered most effective by just 3.7% of users).

Among gun owners 43% report that their guns were acquired "at least in part for protection against crime." 76% of those in households with a handgun cite protection from crime as a reason for having guns, while only 22% of those with only longguns mention crime.

Looking at both measures shows that 15% report both having acquired a gun for protection and having kept guns for protection during the last year, 13% say they did not acquire a gun for protection but have kept a gun for this purpose during the last year, 5% that they kept a gun during the last year for protection, but don't currently have a gun in the household, 2% acquired a gun for protection, but had not kept a gun for protection during the last year, 9% owned a gun, but neither acquired nor kept it for anti-crime reasons, 54% neither owned, nor kept a gun for protection, and 2% gave incomplete information.

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 towards guns and the regulation of firearms.

Perceived Safety that Guns Provide

People are very divided about whether having a gun in a home usually makes it safer or less safe. 39% consider an armed home as safer, 16% say it depends or aren't sure, and 45% think guns make it less safe. Likewise, people differ over the safety that allowing widespread concealed carrying affords. 41% see permissive concealed, gun-carrying laws as making things safer, 47% as less safe, 9% as neither safer nor less safe, and 2% are unsure. Looking at these two items jointly shows that 22% feel that both a gun in the home and allowing more guns on the streets improves safety. 28% take the opposite position that guns in both cases decrease safety. The other half takes intermediate positions with 13% feeling that a gun in the home increases safety while allowing more carrying of guns decreases safety and another 13% thinking homes with guns are less safe, but feeling that allowing more concealed carrying would make things safer. The last

quarter are unsure about the safety impact of one or both situations (20%) or think that both have no impact on safety (3%).⁸

Non-gun owners are much more likely than gun owners to see guns both in the home and on the streets as reducing safety. 61% of non-gun owners believe a home is less safe if a firearm is present, 37% of those living in a household with a gun, but not personally owning a weapon, think that guns makes things less safe, as do 18% of those who personally own a gun. Similarly, permissive, concealed carry laws are seen as decreasing safety by 54% of non-gun owners, 52% of those living with, but not owning, a gun, and 34% of those who personally own a gun.

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 13% feel that guns in the home make it less safe and 35% think that allowing more concealed carrying of guns would reduce safety. Among gun owners who didn't acquire a gun for protection, 31% think homes are less safe with guns and 42% consider more guns on the street as being more dangerous. For those without guns the corresponding figures are 59.5% and 53%. Safety concerns are even less for those who carried guns for protection during the last year. Only 7% of gun carriers consider guns in the home less safe and just 23% believe that more concealed carrying of firearms would decrease safety.

Concerns about Being Around Guns

Parents are concerned about having their children being around guns.⁹ People with children under 18 were asked if they would let their child "play in or visit" a house with a handgun present. 69% approved if the handgun was both "unloaded and locked away," 43.5% if the handgun was "loaded but is locked away," and 10% if the handgun was "loaded and not locked way." In addition, 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 towards guns. While a majority of parents (69%) would allow their child around a handgun that was safely stored (locked and unloaded), only a small minority (10%) would tolerate a child being around an unsafely stored weapon (loaded and unlocked).

⁸On the impact of general gun control and concealed carry laws on crime see McDowall, Loftin, and Wiersema, 1995; Lott and Mustard, 1997; Webster, et al., 1997; and Kwon, et al., 1997.

⁹On the safe storage of firearms see Weil and Hemenway, 1992 and Hemenway, Solnick, and Azrael, 1995.

Gun owning parents are less opposed to their children being around guns than parents without guns. Of parents who personally own a gun 8% do not want their child to visit a household with a locked and unloaded handgun, 26% object if the handgun is loaded but locked away, and 77% are opposed if the hand is loaded and unlocked. For parents living with, but not personally owning a gun, the respective objections levels are 27%, 47.5%, and 88.5% and for parents without guns in their household opposition is respectively 41%, 70%, and 95.5%. Similarly, having a visitor with a gun in one's home is opposed by 44% of those personally owning guns, 68% of those living with, but not personally owning a gun, and 72% of those without guns.

Those who think that having a gun makes a home safer are also less opposed to having their children visit a household with a gun. 79% of parents who see guns as enhancing safety would allow a child's visit to a household with a locked and unloaded gun compared to 59% of parents who think guns make a household less safe. If the gun is locked, but loaded, approval drops to 62% and 27% respectively and if the gun is loaded and unlocked, it falls to 16% and 5%. Similarly, a guest with a gun would be permitted by 49% of those seeing guns as increasing safety and 19% of those who think guns lessen safety.

Impact of Possible Events on Likelihood of Keeping a Handgun

The role of safety concerns is also shown by how people evaluate various gun-related incidents. While a plurality typically indicates that their general predisposition towards keeping a handgun would not be altered by specific events, net shifts in reported likelihoods do occur in response to the described incidents. As Table 11 shows, hearing that a neighbor's child was accidentally shot had the largest negative impact (-43 percentage points).¹⁰ This was followed by learning that a) research shows keeping guns increases injuries (-34 points), b) a neighbor's gun was stolen (-20 points), c) a neighbor was shot with his/her own gun by an intruder (-13.5 points), and d) a neighbor used a gun to chase an intruder away (-9 points). Only the event of having oneself or a family member robbed outside one's house slightly increased the likelihood of keeping a gun (+5 points).

What is striking is not so much that clearly negative events or information about guns lead to less inclination to keep a handgun, but that even what might be seen as a positive, gun-related event (using a handgun to scare away an intruder from the house) results in a slight negative shift. This results from the different way that handgun owners and those without handguns view these hypotheticals. As Table 12 indicates, those with handguns are consistently more

¹⁰That is, the percent saying it would make keeping a handgun more likely (5.9) minus the percent saying it would make it less likely (49.0) yields a net likelihood score of -43.1 percentage points.

likely to view the events in a more positive (i.e. pro-handgun) direction than those without handguns. On three of the six events handgun owners are on balance more inclined to keep a gun, while for all six incidents non-handgun owners are less likely to favor keeping a handgun. This means that on three items the hypotheticals move handgun owners and non-owners in opposite directions. For example, regarding scaring away an intruder with a handgun, handgun owners say this would make them more likely to keep a gun (+17 points), presumably because this is seen as confirming their predisposition to see handguns as effective protection against crime. But non-handgun owners say they would be less likely to keep a gun (-19 points), presumably because they see the incident as dangerous, perhaps even reckless.

Knowledge about Gun Safety

Knowledge of gun safety was measured by asking if people knew whether a handgun with its magazine removed might still contain a bullet in the firing chamber and whether the "guns manufactured in the United States are or are not currently regulated by federal safety standards." 65% correctly said that a handgun with its magazine removed might still be fired (20% thought they could not and 15% didn't know). 24.5% correctly indicated that domestically manufactured guns are not regulated by federal safety standards, 45% that guns were regulated, 5% that some guns were, and 24.5% didn't know. Combining the two items made a scale in which 26% were mistaken on both questions, 59% got one right and one wrong, and 15% knew both correct answers.

Why People Don't Own Guns

People who did not personally own a gun in their home were asked why they did not have a gun. The full set of reasons are given in Table 13. The major reason, mentioned by 39%, was simply a lack of interest in having a gun (never felt the need, doesn't hunt, etc.) Almost as frequently mentioned (by 33%) were that guns are too dangerous (e.g. accidents, children, suicides). Next, came opposition to guns on ethical grounds or general principles (12.5%), inexperience with guns (2.3%), and cost (2.0%). Then a small number did not actively oppose having a gun with 2.5% mentioning alternative access (e.g. gun at work or from another household member) and 1.4% indicating they did not have a gun because of circumstances outside their control (e.g. gun stolen). Finally, 7.6% gave miscellaneous reasons, were unsure, or didn't offer an explanation.

In sum, safety concerns are crucial to how people view guns.

People are quite split on whether guns in the home or on the street makes things safer or less safe, although pluralities lean towards the latter conclusion. In addition, safety concerns are one of the chief reasons that people don't own guns, safety-related incidents strongly influence people's expressed likelihood of acquiring a handgun, and safety factors largely explain the willingness of parents to allow children around guns.

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 men are (Smith, 1984; Wirls, 1986; Finlay and Love, 1988; Smith, 1997). Second, as Table 14A demonstrates, 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). For example, 47% of men and 11% of women personally own a gun and among gun owners 39.5% of men and 17.5% of women carried a gun away from home during the last year. Only on reporting on how frequently guns are used for protection do men and women agree. Third, across all topics women are more concerned about guns and more in favor of their regulation (Table 14B). The differences are at least 10 percentage points and go as high as 30+ percentage points. For example, 34% of men and 56% of women think that homes are less safe if guns are present (+22 points); 76% of men and 86% of women want handguns registered (+10 points); and 21% of fathers and 38% of mothers would not let their child visit a home with even a locked and unloaded gun present (+17 points). This same pattern emerges when the three firearm regulation scales introduced earlier are examined. Men support 5.3 and women 6.7 of the general gun control measures (prob.=.000); men back 5.3 and women 5.7 of the gun-safety policies (prob.=.000); and men want 3.7 and women 4.5 of the types of criminals barred from gun purchases (prob=.000)(See Table 9).

Finally, 12% report that there was "a time in your household when there was a disagreement about guns in the house." 10% (or 79% of those reporting a dispute) said that the disagreement was between a man and a woman. In 92% of these disagreements the woman opposed the gun or wanted greater safety taken, in only 2.5% of the cases was the woman pro-gun, and 5% of the time the dispute wasn't pro/anti-gun in nature.

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; and Cassel, et al., 1998). Physicians also support discussing firearm safety with their patients, although many do not regularly carry out such counselling (Smith, 1996). Little is known however about how patients and doctors interact on the gun-safety issue. To find out, patients (i.e. those who had visited a health care provider for themselves or their children during the last year) were asked if their medical care provider had talked to them about various safety issues. 20% reported discussions of car seats or safety belts, 14% of bicycle helmets, 13% of smoke detectors, and 5% of

firearm ownership and storage. Of the 5% who had talked about gun safety, 51% reported the discussion had made them more concerned about guns in the home, 43% said it had no effect, 2% indicated it decreased concern, and 4% were unsure.

However, when all people (patients and non-patients) were asked if they "believe it is appropriate for a health care provider to speak about gun-safety issues," 39% agreed, 57% disagreed, and 5% were unsure. Approval of medical discussion of gun safety is higher among those without guns (41%) than among gun owners (34%). Approval is also very high (82%) among those who have actually talked to a health care provider about the issue, is lower among non-patients (44%) and lowest among patients who hadn't talked about gun-safety issues (34%). This suggests that opposition to hearing gun-safety messages from health care providers comes from those who imagine that the talk would be political rather than medical in nature. Among patients who have actually discussed gun-safety issues there is little objection (18%).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Widespread public support exists for the regulation of firearms. First, majorities back 8 of 11 general measures to regulate guns. Only policies that call for the general prohibition of guns are opposed. Second, support for safety-related measures is even stronger than for the general policies. From two-thirds to over 90% endorse all safety-related items. Third, the public wants to prevent even minor criminals from purchasing guns. From 71% to 89% want to prohibit those convicted of crimes such as driving while intoxicated and domestic violence from buying a gun. Fourth, the public is willing to pay more in taxes and higher prices to reduce gun violence and improve gun safety. Finally, support for gun control has remained high and reasonable stable in recent years.

The United States has a high level of gun ownership and usage. About 39% of households contain a firearm and 24% have a handgun. Among adults about 29% personally own a weapon. In addition, about 11-12% have carried a gun away from home during the last year. Among gun carriers 62% mention personal protection as a reason for going around armed. However, guns are judged to be less effective than other anti-crime measures such as locking doors, joining a neighborhood watch, or keeping a dog.

Gun owners are much less likely to favor the regulation of firearms than non-gun owners are, but even among owners support for controls are often quite high. A majority of gun owners endorse 5 of 11 general regulation measures, all 7 safety policies, and all 5 prohibitions on criminals purchasing guns.

Support for gun control is also lower among those who don't view crime as a serious problem, who oppose government action in general, and who view guns as promoting safety.

People have very mixed feeling about guns and safety. 45% think a gun in the home makes it less safe, while 39% see guns as increasing home safety. Similarly, 47% think that laws that allow the carrying of concealed weapons reduce safety, while 41% see them as enhancing safety.

People want guns to be stored safely and many people avoid keeping guns because of safety concerns. Parents are reluctant to allow a child to visit a home containing a handgun and majorities oppose such visits unless the weapon is both locked away and unloaded and also object to someone with a gun visiting their home.

Handgun owners and non-handgun owners react differently to gun-related incidents. For example, handgun owners say they would be more likely to keep a gun if a neighbor's gun was stolen, but non-handgun owners report that such a theft would reduce their likelihood of keeping a gun.

Women and men have dramatically different views on guns. Women are much less likely to own or use guns than men are, more concerned about gun safety, and more supportive of all measures to control firearms. In addition, in households where a man and woman have had a dispute over guns, women have opposed guns 92% of the time and been more favorable towards guns in only 2.5% of the instances.

Patients are rarely advised by health care providers about firearm safety issues (only 5% during the last year). Of this small number most report that the counselling made them more safety conscious. Those who haven't talked to a health care provider about gun safety are inclined to think that such discussions would be inappropriate, but those that have had such counselling overwhelmingly consider it as appropriate.

People are very concerned about crime, violence, and drugs. Large majorities endorse most general and safety-related measures to regulate firearms and back barring people convicted of minor crimes from purchasing guns. Support is highest among non-gun owners, women, and those concerned about crime and gun safety. But even gun owners back most control measures. To both gun owners and others a wide range of measures to regulate firearms, promote gun safety, and hinder criminals from acquiring weapons are popular and seen as common-sense policies.

Table 1 Support for Gun Control Measures	
Tamper resistant serial numbers on guns	89.6%
Mandatory registration of handguns	81.5
Restrict handgun ammunition like handguns themselves	77.5
Willing to pay \$25 in taxes to reduce gun injuries	71.4
Keep guns from criminals, even if harder for law-abiding	70.1
Handgun owners must at least be licensed and trained	64.1 ^a
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	62.6
Concealed carrying only for those with special needs	57.9
General concealed carrying laws make it less safe	47.4
Ban possession of handguns, except police/authorized	36.1
Total ban on handguns	16.5 ^a

Source: NGPS-98

^a16.5% wanted a "total ban of handgun ownership" and 47.6% said that "handguns owners should be licensed by the government and complete mandatory training." 64.1% favored licensing or a more stringent measure.

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 manufactures to make serial numbers tamper resistant?

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

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

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?

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.

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.

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

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?

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	
Require federal handgun safety standards	93.6%
Require that all new handguns be childproof	87.5
Federal handgun safety standards even if more expense	85.7
Require that new handguns have magazine safety	81.9
Manufacturers liable for injuries from defects in guns	79.3
Require that all new handguns have load indicator	73.2
Require that all new handguns be personalized	71.4
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	67.8

Source: NGPS-98

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 of 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?

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

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?

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?

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 come equipped with a load indicator? Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose such legislation?

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?

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

Table 3 % for Prohibiting Gun Purchases to Criminals	
<i>Convicted of . . .</i>	
Domestic violence	89.2
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	84.5
Drunk and disorderly conduct	83.6
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	82.9
Driving under the influence of alcohol	70.6

Source: NGPS-98

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-98

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 Towards Guns**

	1996	1997/98	Change
A. Support for Gun Control Measures			
Mandatory registration of handguns	81.3	81.5	0.2
Keep guns from criminals, even if harder for law-abiding	78.3	70.1	-8.2**
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	66.3	62.6	-3.7*
General concealed carrying laws make it less safe	55.7	47.4	-8.3*
Concealed carrying only for those with special needs	53.3	57.9	+4.4*
Ban possession of handguns, except police/authorized	35.2	36.1	+0.9
Total ban on handguns	16.1	16.5	+0.4
B. Support for Gun Safety Measures and Beliefs			
Require that all new handguns be childproof	85.8	87.5	+2.0**
Require that all new handguns be personalized	68.0	71.4	+3.4*
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	74.6	67.8	-6.8*
Home less safe with handgun	43.4	45.4	+2.0**
C. Prohibiting Gun Purchases to Criminals Convicted of...			
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	77.9	84.5	+6.6**
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	85.4	82.9	-2.5
Driving under the influence of alcohol	63.1	70.6	+7.5**

Source: NGPS-96 and NGPS-98.

Question Wording: See Tables 1-3

*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			38.6
Respondent Owns Gun			28.7
Other Person Owns Gun			10.6
No Gun in Household			60.6
Have Handgun in Household			24.0
Respondent Owns Handgun			18.4
No Guns in Household			59.0
Handgun Only			6.0
Longgun Only			15.8
Both Types of Guns			19.2
Bought Handgun			25.3
Never Bought Handgun			73.6
Refused, etc.			1.1
B. Ownership by Socio-Demographics	Gun in Household	Handgun in Household	Personally Owns Gun
Men	49.0	31.1	47.3
Women	28.9**	17.5**	11.4**
Northeast	25.6	15.0	15.8
Midwest	47.3	24.4	35.7
South	44.1	28.9	32.0
West	32.1**	23.9	27.8**
Married	46.9	28.0	34.8
Divorced	37.5	30.8	32.7
Separated	33.6	27.2	26.7
Widowed	20.8	16.8	17.6
Never Married	22.9**	12.1**	13.6**
Less than High School	39.3	19.7	30.0
High School	39.0	25.1	27.4
College	39.3	26.1	29.8
Greater than College	32.0	19.8	25.2

**Table 6
Levels and Distribution of Gun Ownership and Purchases (Continued)**

<i>B. Ownership by Socio-Demographics</i>	Gun in Household	Handgun in Household	Personally Owns Gun
\$0 - 9,999	26.9	13.3	16.5
\$10,000 - 19,999	30.6	15.8	25.6
\$20,000 - 29,999	38.7	24.9	29.0
\$30,000 - 39,999	44.9	31.4	30.4
\$40,000 - 49,999	39.3	25.3	31.5
\$50,000 - 59,999	46.1	31.1	37.8
\$60,000 - 79,999	47.4	29.9	38.9
\$80,000 +	49.4**	33.2**	31.5**
Less than 30	27.1	13.1	14.0
30 - 39	41.5	22.4	32.2
40 - 49	46.6	34.4	37.2
50 - 65	45.4	29.2	36.7
65+	34.6*	22.0**	25.0**
No children in home	36.6	23.6	28.3
1	43.6	29.1	33.5
2	43.4	24.0	32.0
3	37.6	20.5	24.6
4+	34.2	17.9	14.2

Source: NGPS-98

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

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

**Table 7
The Ownership of Guns**

<i>A. Trends in Gun Ownership - Overall</i>	% of Adults in Households with Guns	% of Households with Guns	% of Adults Personally Owning Gun
1973	49.1	47.3	—
1974	47.9	46.2	—
1976	49.7	46.7	—
1977	54.0	50.7	—
1980	50.8	47.7	29.0
1982	48.9	45.5	29.1
1984	48.5	45.2	25.5
1985	48.1	44.3	30.7
1987	48.6	46.1	28.2
1988	43.4	40.1	25.2
1989	48.9	46.1	27.4
1990	45.8	42.7	28.7
1991	43.7	39.9	27.6
1993	45.5	42.1	29.4
1994	43.9	40.2	28.5
1996a	43.4	40.7	27.2
1996b	42.3	39.1	30.8
1998	38.6	38.4	28.7
<i>B. Trends in Gun Ownership - Type of Firearm</i>		% of Adults in Households with Handguns	% of Adults in Households 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

**Table 7
The Ownership of Guns (Continued)**

<i>B. Trends in Gun Ownership - Type of Firearm</i>	% of Adults in Households with Handguns	% of Adults in Households with Longguns
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
1998	24.0	31.1

Source: GSS, 1973-1996a; NGPS-96, 1996b; NGPS-98, 1998

Table 8
Attitudes Toward Guns by Gun Ownership

	Personally Owns Gun	Gun in Household	No Gun in Household	No Gun Minus Personally Owns Gun*	Prob
Tamper resistant serial numbers on guns	85.4	91.8	92.5	+ 7.1	.004
Mandatory registration of handguns	72.0	86.2	85.4	+ 13.4	.000
Restrict handgun ammunition like handguns themselves	58.0	81.9	86.3	+28.3	.000
Willing to pay taxes to reduce gun injuries	61.9	69.8	69.0	+ 7.1	.165
Keep guns from criminals, even if harder for law-abiding	51.8	65.7	78.1	+ 26.3	.000
Handgun owners must at least be licensed and trained	39.2	58.7	77.5	+38.3	.000
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	45.2	68.3	69.7	+24.5	.000
Concealed carrying only for those with special needs	40.8	51.1	68.0	+27.2	.000
General concealed carrying laws make it less safe	33.8	52.4	53.9	+ 20.1	.000
Ban possession of handguns, except police/authorized	13.1	31.7	48.3	+35.2	.000
Total ban on handguns	3.7	12.9	23.4	+19.7	.000
Federal handgun safety standards like imports	92.8	94.6	93.6	+0.8	.296
Require that all new handguns be childproof	79.4	91.8	91.1	+11.7	.000
Require that new handguns have magazine safety	74.5	84.4	85.7	+11.2	.003
Manufacturers liable for injuries from defects in guns	80.8	80.4	78.5	- 2.3	.902
Require that all new handguns have load indicator	59.4	78.6	79.0	+19.6	.000
Require that all new handguns be personalized	58.8	71.2	78.4	+19.6	.000
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	64.0	68.9	69.6	+5.6	.050
Domestic violence	80.0	97.3	92.2	+12.2	.000

*"No Gun," indicates the difference in level of support between those who personally own guns and those who do not.

Table 8
Attitudes Toward Guns by Gun Ownership (Continued)

	Personally owns Gun	Gun in Household	No Gun in Household	No Gun Minus Personally Owns Gun	Prob
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	75.3	89.8	88.2	+12.9	.000
Drunk and disorderly conduct	73.1	85.7	88.5	+15.4	.000
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	70.1	82.6	89.6	+19.5	.000
Driving under the influence of alcohol	58.4	69.0	77.0	+18.6	.000
Less safe if gun in home	17.8	27.3	61.1	+43.3	.000
Spend more for gun violence research	37.5	52.2	51.8	+14.3	.001
Neighbor's child accidentally shot	25.8	47.4	61.2	+35.4	.000
Research shows guns increase injuries	21.9	47.5	55.4	+27.7	.000
Neighbor's gun stolen	18.7	30.9	42.1	+23.4	.000
Neighbor shot with own gun by intruder	14.6	29.8	45.0	+30.4	.000
Neighbor uses gun to scare away intruder	14.9	24.9	39.7	+24.8	.000
You/family members robbed outside house	12.9	23.4	38.5	+25.6	.000
No visit if gun unloaded and locked away	8.1	27.1	41.3	+33.2	.000
No visit if gun loaded but locked away	26.2	47.5	70.3	+44.1	.000
No visit if gun loaded and unlocked	77.1	88.5	95.5	+18.4	.000
No guest with gun in household	43.7	68.4	72.2	+28.5	.000
Health care provider should talk to patients about gun safety	32.4	38.9	41.8	+9.4	.330

Source: NGPS-98

Question Wordings:

See other Tables.

Table 9
Attitudes Toward Guns by Socio-Demographics

	General Firearm Regulation	Gun Safety Measures	Barring Guns to Criminals
Men	5.3	5.25	3.7
Women	6.7**	5.7**	4.5**
Northeast	6.6	5.7	4.3
Midwest	6.2	5.4	4.0
South	5.85	5.6	4.1
West	5.7**	5.2*	4.0*
Married	6.0	5.6	4.1
Divorced	5.75	5.3	4.0
Separated	5.6	5.7	3.6
Widowed	6.6	5.0	4.7
Never Married	6.3*	5.4*	4.1**
Less than High School	6.1	5.3	4.4
High School	5.8	5.5	4.0
College	6.1	5.5	4.0
Greater than College	6.6*	5.7	4.0*
\$0-9,999	6.3	5.1	4.4
\$10,000-19,999	6.2	5.5	4.2
\$20,000-29,999	6.0	5.5	4.1
\$30,000-39,999	6.0	5.6	4.1
\$40,000-49,999	6.0	5.6	3.8
\$50,000-59,999	6.0	5.7	4.2
\$60,000-79,999	6.5	5.7	4.1
\$80,000+	6.2	5.6*	3.9*
Less than 30	6.4	5.7	4.0
30-39	5.9	5.6	4.0
40-49	5.9	5.5	3.9
50-65	6.1	5.3	4.2
65+	6.1	5.0**	4.5**

Table 9
Attitudes Toward Guns by Socio-Demographics (Continued)

	General Firearm Regulation	Gun Safety Measures	Barring Guns to Criminals
No children in home	6.0	5.4	4.2
1	6.0	5.4	3.9
2	6.5	5.7	4.1
3	5.7	5.6	4.0
4+	6.0	5.2	4.1

Source: NGPS-98

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

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

**Table 10
Crime Precautions**

	% Using Measure	% Judging as Most Effective
Locked your doors	94.3	24.5
Acted more aware or cautious	78.9	40.8
Stayed in at night	36.1	5.3
Kept a gun in the house	32.8	4.5
Kept a dog	29.9	5.8
Joined or participated in a neighborhood watch program	21.2	6.6
Used a home burglary system or security system	19.5	5.4
Carried mace or some other self-protection chemical	18.6	0.7
Obtained self-defense training or education	17.8	3.9
Carried a gun away from home	11.0	1.5

Source: NGPS-98

Question Wording: Which of the following precautions have you yourself taken during the last 12 months, from MONTH/YEAR to now, to protect yourself from crime? Have you...

Which of these measures do you think is most effective in protecting yourself from crime?

Table 11
Expected Impact of Various Gun-Related Events on Likelihood of Keeping a Handgun

	Neighbor's Child Accidentally Shot	Research Shows Guns Increase Injuries	Neighbor's Gun Stolen	Neighbor Shot with Own Gun	Neighbor Uses Gun to Scare Intruder	You Are Robbed Outside House
Much Less Likely	33.4	30.1	20.8	19.8	21.3	18.5
Somewhat Less Likely	15.6	14.4	12.9	14.4	9.1	10.6
No Effect	44.5	44.0	52.3	44.5	47.1	36.0
Somewhat More Likely	3.5	5.8	7.5	10.7	11.4	15.6
Much More Likely	2.4	5.1	5.9	10.0	10.2	18.9
Don't Know, etc.	0.7	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.9	0.4
Net Likelihood (More - Less Likely)	-43.1	-33.6	-20.3	-13.5	- 8.8	+5.4

Source: NGPS-98

Question Wordings: Next is a series of questions that describe different situations. Would each situation make you much less likely to keep a handgun, somewhat less likely to keep a handgun, have no effect on having a handgun, make you somewhat more likely to keep a handgun, or make you much more likely to keep a handgun?

- a. Your neighbor is shot at home with the neighbor's own gun by an intruder.
- b. Your neighbor's gun is stolen.
- c. Your neighbor's child accidentally shoots him or herself while playing with his or her parent's gun.
- d. You or a member of your household is robbed while getting out of the car in front of your house.
- e. A new research study is published showing that having a handgun in the home increases the chances of a gun injury.
- f. Your neighbors used a handgun to scare away an intruder from their house.

Table 12 Expected Impact of Various Gun-Related Events on Likelihood of Keeping a Handgun by Current Ownership of Handgun (Net Likelihood)		
	Handgun Household	No Handgun
Neighbor's child accidentally shot	-16.0	-52.7
Research shows guns increase injuries	-11.5	-41.6
Neighbor's gun stolen	+2.5	-28.3
Neighbor shot with own gun	-16.6	-24.3
Neighbor uses gun to scare away intruder	+17.4	-18.8
You/family members robbed outside house	+40.5	-7.1

Source: NGPS-98

Question Wordings: See Table 10.

Table 13 Reasons for Not Owning a Gun	
Never felt the need for a gun	35.2%
Against guns/ethical reasons	11.6
Have children in the house	11.0
Felt guns more a threat than a help	8.4
Afraid of gun accident	6.2
Know someone killed/injured with gun	2.7
Afraid of suicide with gun	2.4
Don't participate in gun-type sports/hunting	2.3
Too expensive	2.0
Doesn't want/no interest	1.6
Can use spouse's, boyfriend's, other's	1.5
Don't know how to use	1.5
Bad temper/fear accident	1.1
Was stolen/destroyed	1.1
Gun may get in wrong hands	1.0
Has gun (e.g. at work)	1.0
Raised not to own gun	0.9
Lacks training/license	0.8
Spouse or girl/boyfriend against guns	0.3
Too young	0.3
Not allowed (e.g. in service)	0.3
Other	5.8
Unsure	1.1

Source: NGPS-98

Question Wordings: Why do you not own a gun? (Asked of people who do not personally own a gun.) Percentages based on all mentions of reasons. Some people gave more than one reason.

Table 14
Gender Differences in Gun Attitudes and Behaviors

	Men	Women	Prob.
A. Behaviors			
Gun in Household	49.0	28.9	.000
Have Gun for Protection (Among Gun Owners)	42.7	44.3	.764
Bought Gun	40.7	11.0	.000
Personally Owns Gun	47.3	11.4	.000
Carried Gun (Among Gun Owners)	39.5	17.5	.000
Carry Gun for Protection (Among Gun Carriers)	60.3	68.9	.379
B. Attitudes			
Mandatory Registration of Handguns	76.1	86.4	.000
Keep Guns from Criminals, Even if Harder for Law-Abiding Citizens	60.4	79.1	.000
Homes Less Safe with Guns	33.7	56.2	.000
Total Ban on Handguns	10.7	21.8	.000
Childproof Guns	83.4	91.4	.000
Require Federal Safety Regs.	66.3	79.1	.000
Magazine Safeties	78.8	84.9	.001
Prohibit Guns if Domestic Viol.	82.7	95.1	.000
Prohibit Guns if Drunk Driver	58.7	81.6	.000
More for Gun Violence Research	43.1	51.3	.028
Less Likely to Keep Gun if Neighbor's Child Accidentally Shot	38.4	58.7	.000
Less Likely to Keep Gun if Robbed	21.2	36.5	.000
Not Allow Child in Home with Even Locked and Unloaded Gun	21.1	37.7	.000

Source: NGPS-98

Question Wordings: See previous Tables.

References

Blendon, Robert J.; Young, John T.; and Hemenway, David, "The American Public and the Gun Control Debate," Journal of the American Medical Association, 275 (June, 1996), 1719-722.

Carter, Gregg Lee, The Gun Control Movement. New York: Twayne, 1997.

Cassel, Christine K.; Nelson, Elizabeth A.; Smith, Tom W.; Schwarb, C. William; Barlow, Barbara; and Gary, Nancy E., "Internists' and Surgeons' Attitudes toward Guns and Firearm Injury Prevention," Annals of Internal Medicine, 128 (February 1, 1998), 224-230.

Crocker, Royce, "Attitudes Toward Gun Control: A Review," in Federal Regulation of Firearms, edited by Congressional Research Service. Washington, DC: GPO, 1982.

Davis, James A. and Smith, Tom W., General Social Surveys, 1972-1996: Cumulative Codebook. Chicago: NORC, 1996.

Finlay, Barbara and Love, Gayle, "Explaining the Gender Gap: The Relevance of Women's Different Voice," Paper presented to the American Sociological Association, Atlanta, August, 1988.

Flanagan, Timothy J. and Longmire, Dennis E. eds., Americans View Crime and Justice: A National Public Opinion Survey. Newbury: Sage, 1996.

Glick, Susan, "Female Persuasion: A Study of How the Firearms Industry Markets to Women and the Reality of Women and Guns," Report of the Violence Policy Center, Washington, DC, 1994.

Grossman, D.C.; Mang, K.; and Rivara, F.P., "Firearm Injury Prevention Counseling by Pediatricians and Family Physicians," Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine, 149 (1995), 973-977.

"Guns Kill U.S. Kids at Highest Rate in Industrialized World," Chicago Tribune, February 7, 1997, Section 1, p. 12.

Haggerty, Catherine C. and Shin, Hee-Choon, "1996 National Gun Policy Survey: Methodology Report," NORC, January, 1997.

Haines, Herbert H., "Nominal Medicalization and Scientific Legitimacy in the Public Health Approach to Violence," Paper presented to the Society for the Study of Social Problems, 1997.

Hemenway, David; Solnick, S.J.; and Azrael, D.R., "Firearm Training and Storage," Journal of the American Medical Association, 273 (1995), 46-50.

Hill, Ronald Paul, "A Consumer Perspective of Handgun Control in the U.S.," Advancing the Consumer Interest, 6 (Spring, 1994), 10-14.

Hopper, JoAnne Stille, et al.; "Female Handgun Ownership, Usage, and Attitudes toward Training: Implications for Public Safety," Journal of Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing, 4 (1996), 99-110.

House, Dawn, "A Sad State of the Nation: U.S. No. 1 in Gun-Related Deaths," Salt Lake Tribune, Jan. 2, 1996.

Kates, D.B.; Schaffer, H.E.; Lattimer, J.K.; Murray, G.B.; and Cassem, E.W., "Guns and Public Health: Epidemic of Violence or Pandemic of Propaganda," Tennessee Law Review, 62 (1995), 513-596.

Kauder, Neal B., "One-Gun-A-Month: Measuring Public Opinion Concerning a Gun Control Initiative," Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 11 (1993), 353-360.

Kleck, Gary, "Crime, Culture Conflict, and the Sources of Support for Gun Control," American Behavioral Scientist, 39 (February, 1996), 387-404.

Kleck, Gary, Point Blank: Guns and Violence in America. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991.

Kwon, Ik-Whan; Scott, Bradley; Safranski, Scott R.; and Bae, Muen, "The Effectiveness of Gun Control Laws: Multivariate Statistical Analysis," American Journal of Economics and Sociology, 56 (Jan., 1997), 41-50.

Lott, John R. and Mustard, David B., "Crime, Deterrence, and the Right-to-Carry Concealed Handguns," Journal of Legal Studies, 26 (1997), 1-68.

Max, E. and Rice, D.P., "Shooting in the Dark: Estimating the Cost of Firearms Injuries," Health Affairs, 12 (1993), 171-185.

McClain, Paula D., "Firearms Ownership, Gun Control Attitudes, and Neighborhood Environment," Law & Policy Quarterly, 5 (July, 1983), 299-323.

McDowall, D.; Loftin, Colin; and Wiersema, B., "Easing Concealed Firearms Laws: Effects on Homicide in Three States," Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, 86 (1995), 193-206.

National Center for Health Statistics, "Firearm Mortality" in Fastats, 1998.

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, National Summary of Injury Mortality Data, 1987-1994. Atlanta: CDC, 1997.

Nelson, D.E.; Grant-Worley, J.A.; Powell, K.; Mercey, J.; and Holtzman, D., "Population Estimates of Household Firearms Storage Practices and Firearm Carrying in Oregon," Journal of the American Medical Association, 275 (1996), 1744-1748.

Price, James H. et al., "Training in Firearms Safety Counseling in Family Practice Residency Programs," Journal of Community Health, 22 (April, 1997), 91-99.

Schuldt, Richard; Judy, Eric; Hostetler, Brendan; and McCool, Matthew, "Public Opinion on Allowing Citizens to Carry Concealed Handguns: The Effect of Question Wording on Majority Opinion," Paper presented to the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research, Chicago, November, 1997.

Schuman, Howard and Presser, Stanley, "Attitude Measurement and the Gun Control Paradox," Public Opinion Quarterly, 41 (Winter 1977-78), 427-438.

Schuman, Howard and Presser, Stanley, Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys, New York: Academic Press, 1981.

Secret, Philip E. and Johnson, James B., "Racial Differences in Attitudes Towards Crime Control," Journal of Criminal Justice, 17 (1989), 361-375.

Singh, Gopal K.; Kochanek, Kenneth D.; and MacDorman, Marian F., "Advance Report of Final Mortality Statistics, 1994," Monthly Vital Statistics Report, 45 (Sept., 30, 1996), 1-79.

Smith, Tom W., "Gender and Attitudes Towards Violence," Public Opinion Quarterly, 48 (Spring, 1984), 384-396.

Smith, Tom W., "Gun Violence, Public Health, and Public Policy: A Report of a Survey of Physicians and Surgeons," NORC: University of Chicago, September, 1996.

Smith, Tom W., "1996 National Gun Policy Survey of the National Opinion Research Center: Research Findings," NORC Report, March, 1997.

Smith, Tom W., "The 75% Solution: An Analysis of the Structure of Attitudes on Gun Control, 1959-1977," Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, 71 (1980), 300-316.

Smith, Tom W. and Smith, Robert J., "Changes in Firearms Ownership Among Women, 1980-1994," Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, 86 (Nov., 1995), 133-149.

Stinchcombe, Arthur L., et al., Crime and Punishment: Changing Attitudes in America. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980.

Teret, S.P. and Baker, S.P., "Children Shooting Guns: A Failure in Product Design," Injury Prevention, 1 (Sept., 1995), 139.

Thompson, Carol Y.; Young, Robert L.; and Creasey, Wendy L., "Women's Emancipation and the Ownership of Firearms," Women and Criminal Justice, 7 (1996), 69-87.

Tyler, Tom R. and Lavrakas, Paul J., "Support for Gun Control: the Influence of Personal, Sociotropic, and Ideological Concerns," Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 13 (1983), 392-405.

United Nations, United Nations International Study on Firearm Regulation. Vienna: UN Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division, 1997.

Vernick, Jon S., et al., "Public Opinion Polling on Gun Policy," Health Affairs, 12 (Winter, 1993), 198-208.

Webster, Daniel W.; Vernick, Jon S.; Ludwig, J.; and Lester, K.J., "Flawed Gun Policy Research Could Endanger Public Safety," American Journal of Public Health, 87 (1997), 918-921.

Weil, D.S. and Hemenway, David, "Loaded Guns in the House: Analysis of a National Random Survey of Gun Owners," Journal of the American Medical Association, 267 (1992), 3033-3037,

Weisman, Carol S., "Armed by Fear: Self-Defense Handguns and Women's Health," Women's Health Issues, 5 (Spring, 1995), 3-7.

Wirks, Daniel, "Reinterpreting the Gender Gap," Public Opinion Quarterly, 50 (Fall, 1986), 316-330.

Woolley, Rachel; Kuby, Alma M.; Shin, Hee-Choon, "1997/1998 National Gun Policy Survey: Methodology Report," NORC: Chicago, 1998.

Wright, James D., "Public Opinion and Gun Control: A Comparison of Results From Two Recent National Surveys," Annals, AAPSS 455 (May, 1981), 24-39.

Wright, James D., "Second Thoughts on Gun Control," Public Interest, 91 (Spring, 1988), 23-29. in Americans View Crime and Justice: A National Public Opinion Survey, edited by Timothy J. Flanagan and Dennis E. Longmire. Newbury: Sage, 1996.

Williams, J. Sherwood; McGrath, John H.; and Creighton-Zollar, Ann, "Race and Pistol Access: Variation among Poor Males," Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology, 23 (Nov., 1995), 77-83.

Tyrey-Jefferson, Susan, "Gun Control: Understanding the Policy Battle," Criminal Justice Review, 20 (Autumn, 1995), 191-198.

Zimring, Franklin and Hawkins, Gordon, "Concealed Handguns: The Counterfeit Deterrent," Responsive Community, 7 (Spring, 1997), 46-60.

Hurlbert, Jeanne S., "The Southern Region: A Test of the Hypothesis of Cultural Distinctiveness," The Sociological Quarterly, 30 (1989), 245-266.

Div. of Violence Prevention, "Firearm-Related Years of Potential Life Lost before Age 65 Years -- United States, 1980-1991," Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report, 43 (August 26, 1994), 609-610.

Zawitz, Marianne W., "Firearm Injury from Crime: Firearms, Crime, and Criminal Justice," Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ-160093, April, 1996.