

**1999 National Gun Policy Survey
of the National Opinion Research Center:
Research Findings**

Tom W. Smith

National Opinion Research Center
University of Chicago

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The public supports a wide range of policies designed to regulate firearms, promote gun safety, and keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

- 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.
- Support for safety measures is even stronger, with large majorities consistently supporting almost 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.
- A consensus prevails both in that those convicted of various misdemeanors should be prohibited from purchasing guns and that the illegal use of guns should be severely punished.
- To help deal with school shootings, the majority endorses prohibiting those under 18 years of age from owning or using firearms, but most reject banning guns from all households with children under 18.
- People are ambivalent about cities suing gun manufacturers for the criminal misuse of firearms, with most people opposed to both such suits and laws that would forbid these suits.
- People back both restricting the import of firearms and applying the gun-safety standards that exist for imported guns to domestically manufactured guns as well.
- Most people oppose permissive, shall-issue, concealed-carry laws.

Attitudes toward gun control are reasonably stable. In part, this is because gun control is a long-debated, political perennial. Also, the stability comes about because views on guns are often deeply rooted, originating from childhood exposure to firearms and community ties to the gun culture. Even the Littleton, Colorado, shootings and other multi-murders did not change attitudes toward guns and gun control, although they did greatly heighten the salience of crime in general and gun violence in particular.

Viewing the dynamics and politics of gun control indicates that the pro-gun-control side holds several advantages.

- On two of three measures of the depth of opinions, those for more gun control have firmer opinions than those opposed to more regulation.

- Counter-arguments on two issues showed that opponents of gun control were more easily swayed than were advocates.
- Pro-gun-control candidates have a voting edge over anti-gun control politicians.
- A greater number of people favor the more pro-gun-control position of the Democrats over the more anti-gun-control stance of the Republican party.
- By a small margin, there has been more pro-gun-control political action by and aimed at people than anti-gun-control activity.

People are very divided on the advantages and disadvantages of having guns and whether guns enhance or undermine personal safety.

- People split evenly on whether guns in the home reduce or increase safety (41% believe safer vs. 43% less safe). However, 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).
- The public is also closely divided on whether more permissive concealed-carry laws enhance safety (44%) or compromise it (45%). People, however, believe that businesses should be able to prohibit even permit holders from bringing guns onto their premises and prefer to go to stores and other establishments that ban guns on their premises over those that allowed guns.
- Parents are very concerned about letting their child go to a household that contained a gun. A majority of parents (70%) approve of a visit only if guns are both locked away and unloaded. Approval falls to 8% if the weapons are not locked away and are loaded.
- Most Americans do not own a gun for the purpose of protection, 60% do not have a gun in their home, and 23% have a gun but did not acquire it even partially for protection against crime. Only 17% have a gun obtained at least in part for protection. Likewise, only 10% of Americans have carried a handgun away from home in the last year and just 6% have carried a weapon for the purpose of self-protection.

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.^{33, 34, 41}
- The disparity is particularly great in regard to children. The rate of firearm deaths to children 14 years and under is 12-times greater in the United States than the average of 25 other high-income countries.¹³
- In 1994-1997, 32,500-39,500 deaths and 64,000-104,000 non-fatal injuries per annum were caused by firearms.^{55, 65, 73, 99}
- In recent years gunshots have been the second leading cause of deaths for people 10-24 years old and the third leading cause of death for persons 25-34 years old.^{11, 55}
- The death rate from firearms in 1997 for all males 15-24 years of age was 38.9 deaths per 100,000 and for black males 15-24 years old, it was 119.9 per 100,000.⁵⁵
- Annually between 1993 and 1998 65-70% of all murders were committed with a firearm, and from 1994 to 1998, 93% of law enforcement officers feloniously killed died from gunshots.⁴

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) violence, guns, and schools, (e) parallels between regulation of tobacco and firearms, (f) imports and firearms, (g) gun-carrying laws and business practices, and (h) the efficacy of gun control in reducing crime;
- How attitudes have changed over time, with a special focus on the impact of the Littleton shootings;
- Dynamics of public opinion on gun control;
- Gun ownership and use, including (a) prevalence and distribution of firearms, (b) practice of carrying weapons away from home, and (c) trends in gun ownership;
- Connection between gun ownership and attitudes toward firearms;
- Socio-demographic differences in attitudes toward firearms, including differences by (a) gender, (b) place of residence, and (c) partisan and ideological preference;

- Crime concerns and gun control; and
- Safety issues related to firearms, including (a) the perceived safety that guns provide, (b) concerns about being around guns, (c) children and guns, and (d) buying personalized handguns.

This report primarily utilizes data from the (1) 1999 National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS-99); (2) 1998 National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS-98); (3) 1997-1998 National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS-97); (4) 1996 National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS-96); and (5) 1972-1998 General Social Survey (GSS) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago.^{12, 77-79} The NGPSs were designed in collaboration with the Center for Gun Policy and Research of 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, NGPS-98, and NGPS-99 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; from September 10 to November 15, 1998; and from September 9 to December 4, 1999. Data analysis used a post-stratification weight that adjusted for age, gender, race, education, and region, according to United States Census figures. Full technical details on the NGPSs appear elsewhere.^{22, 42, 43, 96} The GSSs are full-probability, in-person interviews of adults living in households in the United States. The latest data were collected in February to May 1998. Full technical details appear elsewhere.¹²

THE REGULATION OF FIREARMS

Public support for the regulation of firearms is high, deep, and widespread (Refs. 1-3, 6, 9, 14, 17, 23-24, 26, 31-32, 35-37, 52, 54, 67-69, 72, 74, 77-80, 84-85, 87, 89, 91, 97-98). Large majorities back most general measures for controlling guns, policies to increase gun safety, laws to restrict criminals from acquiring firearms, and measures to reduce school violence. In general, people endorse all measures to regulate guns, increase gun safety, and reduce gun violence, except for policies that entail a general prohibition on owning guns.

General Gun-Control Measures

As Table 1 indicates, majorities support 16 of 19 general measures to regulate guns:

- 90% favor requiring that serial numbers on guns be tamper resistant;
- 82% support requiring a police permit before a gun can be purchased;

- 81% want both a background check and a five-day waiting period before a handgun may be purchased;
- 80% endorse the mandatory registration of handguns and 61% also want mandatory registration of longguns (rifles and shotguns);
- 80% also endorse restricting handgun purchases to those 21 and older;
- 79% favor requiring background checks for sales between private individuals;
- 73% believe that the sale of handgun ammunition should be regulated in the same way as the sale of handguns;
- 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;”
- 71% are willing to pay more taxes to increase police patrols to reduce gun injuries;
- 69% want imported guns that cannot be bought by citizens in their country of origin to be excluded from the American market, and 55% favor banning the importation of all civilian firearms;
- 67% want to ban the sale of all high-capacity gun magazines;
- 66% back the idea that all handgun owners should at least be licensed and trained in the use of their weapons;
- 56% favor allowing concealed-carry permits only for those with special needs, such as private detectives; and
- 54-58% want a ban on the domestic manufacture of “small, easily concealed, and inexpensive handguns.”^A

A narrow plurality of 45% 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; 44% feel that such permissive or shall-issue, concealed-carrying laws make things safer (9% answered neither more nor less safe and 3% don’t know/no answer).

^A Support 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 difference is not statistically significant at the .05 level. For the meaning and use of the term “Saturday night special,” see ref. 66.

Measures that call for the general prohibition of guns are opposed by a majority: only 39% support restricting the possession of handguns to “the police and other authorized persons” and only 13% want a “total ban on handguns.”

To examine people’s summary views on general gun-control measures, a scale was devised such that someone who rejected all 11 of the measures in Table 1 scored zero and someone who accepted all 11 measures to regulate firearms scored 11.^B This scale shows that on average, people approved of 7.0 of the 11 general measures to regulate firearms.

Safety-Related, Gun-Control Measures

Support for safety-related, gun-control measures is even stronger than for the general policies. Majorities back 14 of 16 items in Table 2:

- 94% favor having handguns manufactured in the United States 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;
- 86% also back having all new handguns designed so that they “cannot be fired by a young child’s small hands;”
- 85% support mandatory “gun-safety training” before a person can buy a gun, 68% want all current gun owners to take such a course, and 49% feel that if current owners would not take the course, then they should be required to turn in their weapons;
- 82% support a requirement that pistols have magazine safeties;
- 79% favor making manufacturers liable for any injuries that result from defects in the design or manufacturing of guns;
- 76% want owners to be liable if a gun is not stored properly and is misused by a child;
- 73-74% back the requirements that guns be stored unloaded, that trigger locks must be used, and that guns be kept in locked boxes or cabinets;
- 73% favor having all new handguns come with a load indicator to show if the weapon is loaded.
- 66% want the federal government to regulate the safety design of guns;

^B There are 19 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 items), NGPS-98 (4), and GSS-98 (1). See Table 1 for details.

- 63% back having all new handguns be personalized so that only the owner of a weapon will be able to fire the gun, and 34% would pay \$50 in taxes to enforce a new law that only personalized guns could be sold.

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) training of all gun owners; and (5) such miscellaneous safety-promoting measures 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 devised ranging from zero for someone who opposed all 11 items in Table 2 to a score of 11 for someone who backed each proposal.^C On average, people supported 8.1 of the 11 safety-related measures.

Guns and Criminals

People want to keep guns out of the hands of criminals (Table 3) and to punish the criminal misuse of guns (Table 4). State laws typically restrict convicted felons from legally purchasing guns, but the majority of states allow most of those convicted of misdemeanors to buy guns. However, the public is much less willing to let those convicted of a variety of less serious crimes purchase firearms (Table 3). Ninety percent want to prevent those convicted of domestic violence from buying guns and disapproval is 84% for those guilty of being drunk and disorderly, 83% for those who illegally carried a concealed weapon without a permit, 82% for simple assault, and 67% for those who drove a car while intoxicated. In 1999, when these four types of misdemeanors were asked about, 56% wanted to prohibit *all* four types of criminals from being able to buy a gun or, on average, people supported prohibition for 3.2 of these 4 crimes.

Moreover, people support concrete measures to ensure that those convicted of such crimes are prevented from obtaining handguns. A screening procedure, under which there would be a two-week waiting period and a \$25 processing fee, for all handgun purchases to allow criminal background checks is backed by 79%.^D

People believe that the criminal misuse of firearms is a serious matter that deserves tough punishment (Table 4). Eighty-two percent agree that “the illegal possession of a gun should be treated as a serious crime like a robbery or burglary” and 78% think that “if a gun is used during a

^C There are 16 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. Finally, the item on paying for enforcing a personalized gun law is part of an experiment (reported below) in which the tax rates were varied, so it cannot be utilized.

^D The proposed criminal background check would not be covered by the existing “instant check” system because the crimes named are misdemeanors that are not regularly included in this database.

crime, the sentence should be twice as long.” (67% agree with both statements and only 5% disagree with both.)

The concern about controlling the criminal misuse of guns is so strong that 70% agree “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).

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 and the strong support for these measures reflects, in part, the public’s desire to deny guns to criminals.

Violence, Guns, and Schools

In the aftermath of the school shootings at Littleton, Colorado, and other communities, people support a series of measures to reduce school violence (Table 5). Eighty-one percent favor expelling students “making threats, acting violently, or being mentally unstable,” 74% endorse having metal detectors and security guards in all middle and high schools, 68% support “prohibiting those under 18 from owning or using firearms,” and 29% are willing to go as far as “prohibiting guns in households with anyone under the age of 18.”^E People also mentioned the “availability of guns” as the factor most to blame for the shootings.^F

People want to focus their anti-school-violence efforts at protecting schools by removing dangerous students and enhancing security measures and by restricting youth access to firearms. Eighty percent would restrict handgun purchases to those 21 or older (Table 1), and 68% would deny the ownership and use of firearms to those under age 18 (Table 5). But the public does not favor banning guns from households with youths. Instead it favors measures requiring the safe and secure storage of guns, as indicated in Table 2.

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.^{7, 28, 48, 86} So far the public is not willing to apply this legal

^E A Gallup poll⁷¹ on April 21, 1999, judged the following measures as being very effective “as a way to stop violence in high schools and middle schools”: stricter gun control laws for teenagers (62%), increased counseling for teenagers (60%), metal detectors in schools (53%), stricter regulation of violence on TV and in movies (52%), restrictions on what is available to teenagers on the internet (50%), holding parents legally responsible for crimes their children commit with their parents’ guns (47%), school dress codes (36%), random body searches of students (34%), and stiffer penalties for parents whose children commit crimes (34%).

^F The following were blamed a great deal for “causing shootings like the one in Littleton”: availability of guns (60%), parents (51%), TV programs, movies, and music (49%), social pressures on youth (43%), media coverage of similar incidents (34%), the internet (34%), and schools (11%).⁷¹ See also ref. 62.

theory to firearms. Only 40% favor their state or city “suing gun manufacturers for the medical costs of gun victims and gun injuries,” 54% are opposed, and 3% are unsure or don’t know. However, the public is also opposed to passing laws barring cities from suing gun manufacturers. Thirty-nine percent back the outlawing of such suits, 56% oppose these efforts, and 5% are unsure or undecided.

People however are willing to take another page from the tobacco-industry book—74.5% think Congress should hold hearings to investigate the practices of the gun industry similar to the hearings they held about the tobacco industry; 23% are opposed and 3% are unsure.^G

Imports and Firearms

As indicated in Tables 1 and 2, people want to tighten firearms regulations in relation to imported guns. 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 this means that 53% want to ban imports in general, 15% want to allow only imports that can be sold to citizens in their country of origin, 27% want no import ban, and 6% are unsure or give other answers.

The public wants domestic guns to follow safety standards now imposed on imported weapons (Table 2): 94% think that handguns made in the United States should meet the same “safety and quality standards” that imports must meet. Eighty-six percent feel these standards should be met even if that makes handguns more expensive.

Gun-Carrying Laws and Business Practices

Most people are concerned about the carrying of concealed weapons and laws that would encourage the practice: 56% want to restrict concealed-carry permits to those with special needs, 41% favor permissive, shall-issue laws, and 3% are unsure (see also ref. 1). Also, 76% believe that “public places, such as stores, movies theaters, and restaurants” should be allowed to prohibit people from bringing guns onto their premises. Putting these two items together shows that 50% want to restrict permits to those with special needs and allow businesses to exclude even this group from bringing their guns along, and only 14% want the permissive issuing of permits and to deny businesses the option of excluding concealed weapons from their premises. In addition, 67% would be more likely to patronize businesses that did prohibit concealed guns.^H

^G The 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?”

^H The item read “Would you be more or less likely to go to those businesses (i.e. movie theaters, stores, restaurants) that *prohibit* people from carrying concealed weapons on the premises?”

Even those who favor permissive, concealed-carry laws nevertheless have concerns or reservations about the actual presence of concealed weapons. Most of those for easy access to conceal-carry permits also favor allowing businesses to prohibit guns (57.5%); 53% would be more willing to go to a business that prohibited guns and only 17% would be less likely to go there (30% said it would not make a difference or they are unsure).

The Efficacy of Gun Control in Reducing Crime

People's opinions are quite spread out regarding "how helpful...stricter gun-control measures [would] be to reducing violent crime": 18% said extremely helpful, 18% very helpful, 30% somewhat helpful, 14% a little helpful, and 19% not helpful. Exposure to guns strongly influences one's assessment of the usefulness of gun-control laws in reducing crime. Among those personally owning guns, 21% see gun-control laws as highly (extremely+very) helpful in reducing violence. Among those living in a household with a gun, 25% view such laws as highly helpful. For those with no guns, 46.5% see gun-control measures as helping to reduce violent crime. Of those who ever have bought a handgun, 22% think gun-control laws would be highly helpful, as compared to 40.5% of those who never bought a handgun.

Also, those who see the presence of guns as increasing safety are less sanguine about the impact of laws on violent crime. Among those believing that guns make homes safer, 26% think that gun-control regulations would be highly helpful in reducing violence as opposed to 47% of those who feel that guns make homes less safe. Likewise, 33% of those thinking that permissive, concealed-carry laws improve safety believe gun-control laws would be highly helpful vs. 42% of those who see easier access to concealed-carry permits as making things less safe.

The perceived helpfulness of stricter, gun-control measures in controlling violent crime is strongly related to support for such laws. Those judging such laws as extremely helpful back 8.3 measures on the general firearms-regulation scale. Those saying such laws would be very helpful back 8.2 measures; somewhat helpful, 7.5 measures; a little helpful, 6.4 measures; and as not helpful, 4.5 measures. Likewise, if support for stricter laws is correlated with backing for the gun-safety scale, those saying such laws would be extremely helpful support 9.6 measures; very helpful, 9.1 measures; somewhat helpful, 8.7 measures; a little helpful, 7.0; and not helpful, 5.5 measures. Similarly, correlation of the deny-guns-to-criminals scale with the helpfulness of stricter gun-control laws is as follows: extremely helpful, 3.6 measures; very helpful, 3.5 measures; somewhat helpful, 3.4 measures; a little helpful, 2.9 measures, and not helpful, 2.5 measures.

TRENDS IN ATTITUDES TOWARD THE REGULATION OF FIREARMS

Gun control is a much discussed issue that has been debated at the national level since the mid-sixties. Thus, public opinion on gun control tends to be mature and not subject to large or sudden fluctuations or shifts (Table 6). Moreover, what change has occurred has tended to be movement back-and-forth, rather than clear, long-term trends in one direction.

- For the 13 general regulation items that were repeated between 1996 and 1999, one item showed no statistically significant change, four had gains in support, and eight evidenced decreases. The average change across items from the first to the most recent year was -3.0 percentage points.
- For the 12 safety-related items, there were three trends with no statistically significant change, one increase in support, and eight declines. The average change across years was -3.6 percentage points.
- Of the five items relating to criminal prohibition asked over time, one did not show any statistically significant change, three had a rise in support, and one had less support. The average change was -0.3 percentage point.
- Two items on illegal gun use both showed decline in support for gun-control measures. The average change for these items was -3.9 percentage points.
- For four miscellaneous measures, no statistically significant change occurred for one series, one increased, and two decreased. The average change was -0.9 percentage point.

Overall, of the 36 time series, support for gun control and related measures did not change for six, nine gained support, and 21 lost support. The average change from first to most recent time point was -2.6 percentage points. For the 14 trends that have a time point in 1996 and 1999, no statistically significant differences occurred in six cases, two gained, and six had apparent declines.¹

Among these mixed and moderate changes is a pattern across the years. Of the 13 items asked in each of the four NGPSs, there was no net change from 1996 to 1997, with six decreases and seven

¹ “Apparent” is added because in three of these cases the decline was debatable. Support for the mandatory registration of handguns did drop by 1.3 percentage points, but opposition fell by 0.4 percentage points, with the only gain being a rise of 1.7 percentage points in don’t knows. Also, support for childproofing declined by a minuscule 0.2 percentage point, but this decline consisted of a gain of 6.6 percentage points in those *strongly favoring* and a loss of 6.8 percentage points among those only *favoring* childproofing. Thus, support marginally declined while it significantly strengthened within the favoring side. In addition, those seeing handguns in the home as making things less safe also dropped by 0.2 percentage points, but the main change was moving from the ends toward the middle. The percent saying it was *much safer* or *much less safe* dropped from 30.0% to 21.7% and the percent saying it was just *safer* or *less safe* or *depends* rose from 66.3% to 76.0%. Thus, an adjusted tally would show one no change, three mixed changes, two gains, and three losses in support.

gains in support; a general rise in support from 1997 to 1998 with 3 declines and 10 increases; and an almost uniform fall from 1998 to 1999, with lower support for 12 of 13 items.^J

The general decline in support from 1998 to 1999 was surprising given the Littleton shootings on April 20, 1999, about mid-way between the 1998 and 1999 NGPSs, and the resulting media and political attention given to this and other high-profile, multi-murders (e.g., the Atlanta stockbroker and the Fort Worth church shootings). Consequently a closer look at attitudes toward gun control before and after Littleton was conducted.

The Littleton shootings attracted a tremendous amount of media and public attention. According to the Tyndall Report,⁹⁰ the Columbine High School killings had the third highest number of minutes in evening network news coverage, behind only the war in Kosovo and the Clinton scandal and impeachment. If anything, the public's attention was even greater. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press⁷⁰ found Littleton to be the third top news event of the 1990s, with 68% of the public reporting that they were following the story "very closely," behind only the Rodney King verdict in 1992 (70%) and the crash of TWA flight 800 in 1996 (69%).

However, the idea that the shootings created a surge of support for gun control is not supported by the evidence. Of the 34 items that were asked in both the 1998 and 1999 NGPSs (Table 6), six showed no statistically significant change, two had increases in support, and 26 had decreases in approval. Nine time series from other sources that measured attitudes toward or beliefs about gun control before and after Littleton (Table 7) showed a very mixed response, even looking only at the short-term impact. Four series showed an increase, four a decrease, and one no change. When the changes over a somewhat longer time frame are considered, only two gained in support, four dropped, and three cases showed no change. Likewise, short post-Littleton trends of greater support in three items showed declines. Thus, there is little indication that Littleton generally increased support for gun control in the short term and no sign that it did so after about six months.^{18, 59-63}

What Littleton did do was increase the salience and importance of crime in general and gun violence in particular in the public's mind. As Table 8 indicates, in the immediate aftermath of the shootings, mentions of crime in general and gun violence in particular as the most important problems facing the country and as the matters the government should most address grew several-fold.

Attitudes toward the regulation of firearms have shown great stability over the last 40 years. Except for a period in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when support for gun-control measures rose moderately, attitudes generally have been stable.^{77, 80, 85} In the late 1990s, support has shown only moderate swings, up a bit in 1998 and down a little in 1999. The stability of these attitudes comes from two causes. First, gun control has been a long-debated issue that is familiar to most people and has been long-discussed in the political arena. Second, attitudes toward guns are shaped by one's prior experience with firearms, especially by exposure to guns while growing up and by the prominence of the gun culture in one's local community. These formative experiences tend to fix people's attitudes toward guns and gun control. Even a tragedy as great and shocking as the Littleton

^J These figures refer only to the direction of changes as reported in Table 6, not to whether the changes were statistically significant.

shootings did little to change people's opinions. However, Littleton did bring gun control to the top of people's minds and notably advance its place on the political agenda.^{8, 10, 15, 47, 57}

THE DYNAMICS OF PUBLIC OPINION ON GUN CONTROL

Public opinion may consist of stable, well-founded attitudes based on considerable information and deliberation or labile expressions that have little content or consequence, what Phil Converse has called "non-attitudes." To really understand public opinion on an issue, it is necessary to consider not only the direction of opinion, but what weight or substance exists behind the expressed attitudes.

One way to assess the lability of public opinion is to ask people to evaluate their own opinions along several non-affective dimensions.⁷⁵ In this survey, after having been asked most of the attitude items about firearms, people were asked three questions about their attitudes on this topic:

- "How important is the gun-control issue to you—would you say it is one of the most important, important, not very important, or not at all important?";
- "How much information do you have about the gun control issue? Do you have all the information you need, most of the information, some information, or very little information?";
- "How firm are you about your opinion on gun control—would you say you are very likely to change your opinion, somewhat likely to change, somewhat unlikely to change, or very unlikely to change?".

Most people said that gun control was one of the most important issues (26%) or an important issue (57%), that they were very unlikely to change their opinion (57%) or somewhat unlikely (25%), but that they had little (33%) or only some (36%) of the information they needed. People who consider that an issue is important, who say they are unlikely to change their opinion, and who feel they have the information they need, have well-organized opinions that tend to remain stable over time and are consistently associated with opinions on related topics.⁷⁵

To see how these indicators of the quality and rootedness of opinions were related to a respondent's substantive position on gun control, the three gun scales were recoded into pro-, moderate, and anti-gun-control groups. On the general gun-control, gun-safety, and denying-guns-to-criminals scales, those who were for gun control were the most likely to consider the issue as one of the most important and to be very unlikely to consider changing their opinion. For example, on the general scale, 55% of those opposed to gun control were very unlikely to change, as were 52% of those in the middle, and 67% of those for gun control (prob.=.000), and on the gun-safety scale, 20% in the anti-gun-control camp, 27% in the middle, and 31% on the pro-gun-control side rated the issue as among the most important (prob.=.000). On the information scale, the pattern is reversed, with those opposed to gun control on all three scales being more likely to say they had the information they

needed. For example, of those less in favor of denying guns to criminals, 22% said they had all the information they needed, as did 11% in the middle, and 8.5% on the pro-gun-control side (prob.=.000).^K This pattern is somewhat unusual since these three measures would usually all align in the same direction. While the picture is mixed, the results indicate that pro-gun-control opinions are at least as firmly held as anti-gun-control sentiments.

Another test of the mettle of public opinion toward gun control comes from two, counter-arguing experiments. Counter-arguing is a technique in which people are asked their opinion on a topic and then are given a follow-up question that raises an argument counter to the position they expressed in the initial question. The purpose of counter-arguing is to see which side is more fixed or unswayable in its position. In the first test people were asked whether they were for or against the mandatory registration of handguns (Table 1).

- Those who favored mandatory registration of handguns then were asked, “This would mean that millions of law-abiding citizens who have owned handguns for years would have to report their weapons to the government. Taking this into consideration, do you favor or oppose the mandatory registration of handguns and pistols?”
- Those who opposed mandatory registration of handguns were asked, “A number of law enforcement organizations favor the mandatory registration of handguns to help them trace guns used in crimes and to restrict the illegal ownership and criminal misuse of handguns. Taking this into consideration, do you favor or oppose the mandatory registration of handguns and pistols?”

Of those initially in favor of handgun registration, 84% remained in favor after hearing the counter-arguing, follow-up question (2% moved to don’t know and 14% switched sides). Of those initially opposed to handgun registration, 69% continued to oppose it after hearing the counter-arguing item (0.5% moved to don’t know and 30% reversed their opinion).

The second set of counter-arguing items followed the item on whether any adult who has passed a criminal background check and taken a gun-safety course should be issued a concealed-carrying permit or whether concealed carrying should be restricted only to those with special needs (Table 1).

- Those favoring the special-needs-only provisions were asked, “This would mean that most law-abiding people could not carry concealed handguns even if they thought they needed to for self-protection. Taking this into consideration, should licenses to allow people to carry 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?”
- Those who favored the permissive or shall-issue position were asked, “This would mean that anyone with a concealed-carry permit could bring handguns into stores and malls, restaurants and bars, and other public places. Taking this into consideration, should licenses to allow people to carry firearms be issued to any adult who has passed a criminal background check and a gun-

^K This is not to say that this side is actually better informed, only that they believe they are. A test of knowledge about guns showed that those with anti-gun-control positions were less knowledgeable than those for gun control.⁷⁹

safety course, or only to people with a special need to carry a concealed gun, such as private detectives?”

Of those initially in favor of restricting concealed carrying permits to those with special needs, 82% remained in favor after hearing the counter-arguing, follow-up question (3.5% moved to don't know and 15% switched sides). Of those initially in favor of the more permissive issuing of concealed-carry permits, 61% continued to favor it after hearing the counter-arguing item (9% moved to don't know and 30% reversed their opinion). Thus, on both counter-arguing items gun-control advocates were more likely than opponents to stay with their position after hearing a reason for changing it.

In sum, the counter-arguing experiments and, to a lesser extent, the measures of opinion crystallization indicate that pro-control attitudes are firmer and more anchored than are anti-control positions.

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.³⁴ As Table 9A indicates, about 40% of U.S. households have a gun and 22% contain a handgun. Longguns are more common than handguns, with 17% of households having only longguns and 6% just handguns. In addition, 18% of households have both longguns and handguns. Of the respondents, 27% personally own a gun (as opposed to merely living in a household with a gun) and 17% personally own a handgun. Also, 21% have bought a handgun. Looking at both handgun purchases and the possession of handguns indicates that 29% of adults have had contact with handguns (14% have both bought a handgun and have a handgun in their household; 8% 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-demographics groups (Table 9B). The profile of gun owners is as follows:

- Both household and personal ownership is greater among men than women. (See later section for details.)
- Ownership is lowest in large cities and greatest in rural areas. Likewise it is lowest in the more urban Northeast and higher in more rural regions. (Details in later section.)
- The married are most likely to have guns in general, with the never married the least likely to have a weapon.

- Gun ownership varies little by educational level.
- Gun ownership initially increases with household income, but then falls off somewhat after income exceeds \$60,000.
- 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 0-1 children under 18 years are somewhat, but not significantly, more likely to contain guns than households with 2 or more children. (The higher ownership among those with 4+ children is based on a small number of cases and is not borne out by research from prior years.⁷⁹)
- Gun ownership is greater among Republicans and conservatives, lowest among Democrats and liberals, and intermediate for Independents and moderates. (Details discussed below.)

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 40% of households contain a gun and 22% have a handgun, only about 10% of adults have carried a handgun away from home during the last year.^L Handgun carrying appears to be pretty stable over time, with 12% reporting carrying in 1997-1998, 9% in 1998, and 10% in 1999. Eighty-six percent of those who carry a gun away from home at least sometimes have it with them in their car or truck. Even among residents of gun-owning households, carrying handguns away from home is fairly uncommon, with only 25.5% having done so in the last year.^M

^L On the NGPS-97 the rate of carrying guns could be estimated from two items. First, as part of an anti-crime battery⁷⁸ 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-99. See also the Oregon estimates in ref. 58 and national figures in ref. 38.

^M For gun carrying by youths see ref. 30.

People carry handguns away from home for various reasons. The most common reason (66% of those carrying a gun) was going to a firing range or for target practice. This was followed by personal protection (63%), hunting (38%), work-related (17%), and other (8%). Many people carried a handgun for more than one reason, with people on average mentioning two reasons. Among handgun carriers, 51% cited both protection and another reason, 32% mentioned only other reasons, and 17% gave protection as their only reason.

About half (51%) of handgun carriers usually have their weapon loaded when they are carrying it. This level has remained stable over time. Those who carry a gun for protection are also more likely to have it loaded. For example, 65% of those carrying for protection usually have the gun loaded, while 28% of those who carry it only for other reasons have it loaded.

Fifty-five percent of handgun carriers have a permit for carrying a handgun. This number has steadily risen in recent years, from 42% in 1997-1998 to 47% in 1998, and 55% in 1999. This may reflect the increased number of states with permissive, concealed-carry laws. Permits are more common among those who carry a handgun for work or for multiple reasons. Contrary to earlier results,⁷⁹ permits are not more common among those using the handgun for protection rather than for other uses.

Trends in Gun Ownership

The proportion of households with a firearm has been in slow decline over the last quarter century (Table 10).¹⁹ In the early 1970s about 50% of adults lived in households that kept a firearm. This now has fallen to 40% or lower. 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 and 1999 even this level showed some evidence of decline to about 25% of adults personally owning a gun.

Also the types of firearms that people own has shifted. As hunting has declined as a recreational pursuit,⁷⁷ the proportion of adults in households with longguns has decreased from about 42% in the early 1970s to about 29-33% 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 1998/1999. Likewise, the proportion ever having bought a handgun increased from 21% in 1996 to 25% in 1997-1998 and then fell to 20-21% in 1998/1999.^N

^N The quantity of new handguns (domestic manufacturing plus net imports) increased in the 1980s and early 1990s, then declined.⁶⁴

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 11 shows, people's views vary greatly according to whether they personally own a gun, live in a household with a gun (but do not personally own a firearm), or live in a household without guns.

- In all but 3 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.
- In 34 cases people who personally own guns are more pro-gun (i.e., less for regulation, less concerned about safety issues) than those without guns.^o Besides being pervasive, these differences are often quite strong. In 20 cases the gap is 20 percentage points or more.
- In most cases (28 of 36), those living in gun households, but not personally owning guns, have attitudes intermediate between those who personally own guns and those living in households without guns. In all instances others in gun households are more supportive of the regulation of firearms and more concerned about their safety than are those who personally own guns.^o In six cases they are even marginally more pro-gun control than are those from households without guns. This non-linearity occurs mostly because the non-owners tend to be women (see Table 9B) and women tend to be more for gun control than are men (see 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 gun-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.

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 6 of the 13 general regulation measures, 10 of the 12 safety policies, all 5 of the items about guns and criminals, and 2 of the 4 miscellaneous items, a majority of those who personally own guns favor the restriction of firearms. For example, 52% of those who personally own guns want the sale of handgun ammunition regulated like handguns

^o The two exceptions (i.e., the only non-positive difference scores in Table 11) are that (1) there is no difference between personal gun owners and those in households without guns in support for federal handgun safety standards (this exception makes sense, since handgun safety standards could benefit gun users) and (2) gun owners are more likely to favor doubling the sentences of criminals using guns (this position is endorsed by the National Rifle Association). Neither of these reversals is statistically significant.

themselves, 65% favor the mandatory registration of handguns, 75% endorse childproofing handguns, and 68% 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 exceptions of the sharp and consistent differences between men and women and by place of residence, which are discussed in later sections, most demographic groups do not differ greatly in their attitudes toward the regulation of firearms and/or do not show consistent differences across the three attitude scales (Table 12). The key patterns not discussed in depth later on are as follows:

- Marital status does not make a great difference. The differences tend to be small and are not consistent across the scales.
- Support for the general regulation of firearms increases with education, but on the denying-guns-to-criminals scale, support wanes with education. The gun-safety scale is unrelated to education.
- Income is not related to attitudes on general firearm regulation, gun safety, or barring guns from criminals.
- Support for safety-related measures is highest among the youngest adults, but restricting criminals is most backed by the oldest adults. General regulation does not vary by age.
- Number of children in the household has no consistent relationship to firearm attitudes.

Gender and Firearms

Men and women have fundamentally different viewpoints on firearms and their regulation. In general, women are more opposed to violence and the use of force than are men.^{76, 95, 16, 77} However, men are much more likely to own and use guns than are women.^{82, 21, 94, 27, 88, 51} For example, 44% of men and 12% of women personally own a gun and 33% of men and 10% of women have ever bought a handgun.

Across all 36 topics women are more concerned about guns and more in favor of their regulation, and 34 of the differences are statistically significant (Table 13). The difference are often quite

pronounced. In 15 cases they range from 10 to 20 percentage points and in 10 instances, over 20 percentage points.^P

Finally, there are sharp gender differences on having guns in the home. The 1998 NGPS found that 16% report there was “a time in your household when there was a disagreement about guns in the house.” Fifteen percent (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 taken; in only 3% of the cases was the woman on the pro-gun side, and 3% of the time the dispute was not pro/anti-gun in nature.

Gun Attitudes and Place of Residence

As Tables 14 and 15 indicate, support for gun-control measures is lowest in rural communities and rural regions and greatest in large metropolitan areas and urban regions. Community type makes the bigger difference of the two residential variables. Of the 35 comparisons, there are statistically significant differences in 26 cases. Rural areas have the least support in 34 of the 35 comparisons (only regarding federal handgun-safety standards are those in towns/small cities less supportive than those in rural communities). The most support for gun-control measures is evenly split between suburbs (15 cases) and large cities (15 cases), plus one tie between them. Also, in 4 cases the most support occurs among those in towns/small cities. In general, the gulf is greatest between rural areas and the other three, more urban community types. Overall, most differences are moderate to large in magnitude, with the gap between the most and least pro-gun-control areas being 10-20 percentage points in 19 cases and over 20 percentage points in 3 cases.

Of course these differences also show up on the three scales. On the general firearms-regulation scale, 6.0 measures are backed in rural areas, 7.2 in towns/small cities, 7.4 in suburbs, and 7.3 in large cities (Table 12). Similarly for the gun-safety scale, 7.1 measures are backed in rural communities, 8.2 in towns/small cities, 8.4 in suburbs, and 8.4 in large cities. For barring guns to criminals, 3.0 crimes are endorsed in rural areas, 3.2 in towns/small cities, and 3.3 in both suburbs and large cities.

Regional differences between the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West are smaller than the variation across community types. Of the 36 comparisons, only 11 are statistically significant. The Northeast is the most supportive, being the highest on 23 comparisons and the lowest on only 3. The South is at the other end, being most supportive of only 3 measures and least supportive of 14. The Midwest (most supportive of 5 and least supportive of 12) and the West (most supportive of 5 and least supportive of 7) are in the middle.

The magnitudes of the differences are also smaller by region than for community type, with the top and bottom regions apart by 10-20 percentage points in 11 cases and over 20 percentage points only once. On the general firearms-regulation scale, there are no statistically significant differences (Table 12). For the gun-safety measures, support is greatest in the Northeast (8.6), least in the South

^P The gender differences on gun control may extend to youths.⁵

and Midwest (both 7.9), and intermediate in the West (8.1). On barring criminals from getting guns, support is highest in the Northeast and the South (both 3.3) and lowest in the Midwest and West (3.0 and 3.1, respectively).^Q

Partisan and Ideological Preferences and Guns

Gun control, like any public policy, exists in a political context. Democrats and Republicans and liberals and conservatives differ on many gun-control issues, and these issues can influence which party and candidates people will vote for in elections. Thus, considerable political activity occurs on this issue, consisting of both pro- and anti-gun-control actions by individuals and contacts by the two camps to shape the public's beliefs and behaviors.

As Table 16 indicates, Republicans and conservatives are generally less supportive of the regulation of firearms than are Democrats and liberals. Of the 34 comparisons on party identification, there are 10 with no statistically significant differences. In 20 comparisons, Republicans are least supportive of gun control, Democrats most supportive, and Independents in the middle. On three items Independents are least in favor of gun control, Republicans in the middle, and Democrats most in favor. On only one item—on backing federal safety standards if they increased the cost of handguns—was the basic pattern marginally reversed, with Republicans being most supportive, Democrats least supportive, and Independents in the middle.

Of the 35 comparisons on political ideology, there are 12 with no statistically significant differences. In 17 comparisons, conservatives are least supportive of gun control, liberals most supportive, and moderates in the middle. For five items, moderates are least in favor of control, conservatives in the middle, and liberals most in favor. On two items, conservatives have the lowest support, liberals are in the middle, and moderates have the highest support.

The partisan differences are somewhat larger than the ideological divisions. There are Democratic-Republican gaps of 10-20 percentage points on 16 issues and two exceed 20 percentage points. There are 13 liberal-conservative differences of 10-20 percentage points and none over 20 percentage points.

Consistent with these item-by-item comparisons, there are statistically significant differences for the three gun-control scales. Mean support for the general measures are 6.7 items for Republicans, 6.8 for Independents, and 7.6 for Democrats (prob.=.000). For the safety scale, the scores are 7.4 items for Republicans, 8.0 for Independents, and 8.7 for Democrats (prob.=.000). For denying guns to criminals, the levels are 3.2 items for Republicans, 3.1 for Independents, and 3.4 for Democrats.

The differences for political ideology are similar. For the general scale, conservatives favor 6.7 items, moderates favor 7.2, and liberals favor 7.6 (prob.=.000); for the gun-safety scale, conservatives are for 7.7 items; moderates for 8.2, and liberals for 8.6 (prob.=.000); and for the no-guns-to-criminals scale, conservatives support 3.2 items, moderates support 3.2, and liberals support 3.3 (prob.=.396).

^Q For more regional breakdowns and some state-level figures, see ref. 81.

Thus, except for the scale on denying guns to criminals, there are significant and regularly ordered relationships between political ideology and partisanship and views on the regulation of firearms. Overall, these differences are fairly consistent and moderate in magnitude, but not nearly as large or widespread as the differences by gun ownership, gender, or locality described above.

In part these partisan and ideological differences come from the greater distrust of government by Republicans and conservatives. For example, 58% of liberals agree that the “government programs are usually effective” vs. 44% of conservatives, and 44% of liberals vs. 32% of conservatives disagree with the statement that the “government does too many things already.” Similarly, 59% of Democrats vs. 45% of Republicans consider government programs as effective, and 48.5% of Democrats vs. 25% of Republicans disagree whether the government is doing too much. In turn, distrust of government is strongly related to opposing gun control. A scale was made from these two items and divided into approximately thirds: more trusting toward government, intermediate, and less trusting. As trust declines so does support for the general firearms scale (from 7.9 to 7.3 to 6.2; prob.=.000), the gun-safety scale (from 9.0 to 8.5 to 7.1; prob.=.000), and the denying-guns-to-criminals scale (from 3.4 to 3.3 to 3.0; prob.=.000).

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.¹

The partisan and ideological differences on gun-control among the public in general yield more political advantage to the pro-gun-control side than to the anti-gun-control position.^R This might be inferred from the mostly large pro-gun-control responses to the numerous questions described in Tables 1-5. Certainly it is apparent from a series of questions that ask about which political party best shares your views on gun control. As Table 17 shows, in all nine comparisons the plurality favors the Democrats over the Republicans. However, the Democratic edge is fairly small, ranging from +3 to +8 percentage points and averaging 5.9 percentage points.

When asked two questions about whether one would be more or less likely to vote for (a) a Congressional candidate who “came out for greater regulation of guns” and (b) a Congressional candidate who “came out against greater regulation of guns,” people indicated in both instances that a pro-control position by the candidate would increase their likelihood of voting for him or her; 53% said they would be more likely to vote for a pro-gun-control candidate; while only 23% would be less likely to vote for such a candidate. This marks a pro-gun-control gain of 30 percentage points. Likewise, 43% said they would be less likely to vote for an anti-gun-control candidate and only 27% would be more likely to support such a candidate. This comes to a pro-gun-control gain of 16 percentage points. Thus, both ways of framing the vote-intentions question show the pro-gun-control position produces political gains. There appears to be even more positive advantage to a pro-gun-control candidate than negative loss for an anti-gun-control contender.

^R This statement does not deal with the power of organized interest groups or their influence over office holders. On the role of interest groups over legislation and politicians, see refs. 20, 29, 74, and 84.

There is a narrow lead in political activism on the pro-gun-control side. People were asked the following six questions:

Have you ever done the following in the past five years...

1. Written a letter to or emailed a public official supporting gun control?
2. Written a letter to or emailed a public official opposing gun control?
3. Given money to an organization which supports gun control?
4. Given money to an organization which opposes gun control?
5. Joined an organization which supports gun control?
6. Joined an organization which opposes gun control?

In answer to these questions, 4.8% reported having written in support of gun control, 6.3% gave money, and 3.9% joined an organization; overall 10.4% did one or more of these pro-gun-control actions. Also, 3.5% wrote against gun control, 5.7% gave money, and 4.6% joined an organization; altogether 9.2% did one or more of these anti-gun-control behaviors. Thus, the segments engaged in political action are about even in size, with a small edge to those for gun control. This pattern is opposed to results from the early 1980s that showed the anti-gun-control camp was more active, but the pattern is consistent with findings in the 1996 NGPS, which also showed more activism in favor of gun control than opposed to it.⁷⁷

Political action of course does not only arise from spontaneous, grass-roots initiatives from the bottom-up, but often originates from organized efforts to stimulate mass activity. To measure this, the following item was asked:

In the past year, many groups have been reaching out to citizens to get them involved in efforts concerning the regulation of firearms. In the past year, have you been contacted to...

1. Join a pro-gun-control group?
2. Join an anti-gun-control group?
3. Express support for gun control to a state legislator or member of Congress?
4. Express opposition to gun control to a state legislator or member of Congress?
5. Sign a pro-gun-control petition?
6. Sign an anti-gun control petition?

On the pro-gun-control side, 6.2% report a solicitation to join a group, 4.8% report being urged to contact a legislator, and 3.3% were requested to sign a petition. Altogether 90% were not approached in any of these three ways by those for gun control; 6.6% had one contact; 2.5% two contacts; and 0.9% all three contacts. On the anti-gun-control side, 4.2% report a call to join a group, 4.0% a request to contact a legislator, and 3.2% being asked to sign a petition. Altogether 91.8% were not approached in any of these three ways by those opposed to gun control; 5.9% had one contact; 1.5% two contacts; and 0.8% all three contacts. Regarding attempts by both pro- and anti-gun control groups, 85.5% were not contacted by either side, 7.3% only or more often by the pro-gun-control camp, 5.1% only or more often by the anti-gun-control groups, and 2.1% had equal contacts by each side. Thus, the contacts efforts were about equal, but the pro-gun-control side reached somewhat more people more often than those opposed to gun control.

The contacts have not fallen evenly on all segments of the population. Those who are against gun control report receiving both more pro- and more anti-gun-control solicitations than those for gun control. For example, of those least in favor of gun control on the general scale, 12.7% had a pro-gun-control contact and 13.1% had an anti-gun-control contact. For those most supportive on the general scale, the pro- and anti-gun-control contact rates were 11.3% and 5.1%, respectively. There also seems to be some enforced targeting since groups report more concordant contacts than discordant ones. For example, of the anti-gun-control group on the safety scale, 9.7% received more anti-gun-control messages, 83.8% had the same amount of messages (most none of either type), and 6.6% got more pro-gun-control messages. Conversely, among the pro-gun-control group, 2.4% had mostly anti-gun-control contacts, 90.0% a equal number of contacts, and 7.5% had more pro-gun-control contacts.

In sum, moderate, but regular, political differences exist among partisan and ideological groups, with Republicans and conservatives giving less support to the regulation of firearms and Democrats and liberals being more in favor of gun control. Within the arena of public opinion and mass action, the pro-gun-control side holds several advantages. First, on most items, majorities favor the pro-gun-control position. Second, pluralities consistently favor the Democratic position on gun control vs. the Republican position. Third, in hypothetical elections, pro-gun-control candidates fare better than those opposed to the regulation of firearms. Fourth, there is slightly more pro-gun-control activism than actions by the opponents of gun control and organized efforts to reach people are a little more common on the pro-gun-control side than among its opponents.

CRIME CONCERNS AND GUN CONTROL

Concern about crime is associated with more support for gun control. This concern was measured by an open-ended question in which people were asked what was the most important problem facing the country. In answer, 27% mentioned crime and violence, 13% drugs, 6% guns; 43% 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 6.7 general regulations, those mentioning one problem favored 7.5 policies, and those citing two or more problems supported 7.2

measures. For the safety scale the pattern was similar: no mentions, 7.7 measures; one mention, 8.6; and 2+ mentions, 8.3. For barring criminals from getting guns, the results were no mentions, 3.1 measures; one mention, 3.4; 2+ mentions, 3.5.^S

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. In the case of whether having a gun in a home usually makes it safer or less safe, 41% consider an armed home as safer, 16% say it depends or are not sure, and 43% 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 1999.

To probe people's beliefs about how guns in the home promote or jeopardize safety, people in NGPS-98 were asked about six statements on gun safety (Table 18). The majority agree 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% agree that a gun "reduced the chances of being burglarized." Even more people believe that a gun in the home increases certain problems: 54% agree 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 the three negative consequences would occur and none of the positive outcomes would happen) to +3 (for someone who agrees with all three positive occurrences and no negative results). Intermediate scores mean that people agreed with some mix of positive and negative statements.^T The net-safety scores were as follows: -3=13%, -2=20%, -1=20%, 0=21%, +1=14%, +2=8%, and +3=4%. That means 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 in 1998

^S There are relatively few cases in the 2+ categories, and this may explain the non-linearity. In earlier NGPSs the relationships were more linear.⁷⁹

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

leaned more toward the assessment that guns in the home make things less safe (53%) than the single item on guns and home safety indicated (46%); 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 respondent's overall judgement about safety to the single item. The percent thinking that guns make things less safe rises from almost 0 for those with a net-safety score of +3 to 89% among those with a score of -3 (percent believing less safe: +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: 15% of those personally owning guns think guns make things less safe, as do 44% of those living in a household with a gun and 57.5% of those without any guns in their household. Similarly, on NGPS-98, those giving a negative net-safety score rises from 22.5% among those personally owning a gun, to 42.5% among others in gun households, to 69% among those without guns in their households.

People also differ over the safety afforded by allowing widespread concealed carrying: 44% see permissive concealed-gun-carrying laws as making things safer, 45% as less safe, 9% as neither safer nor less safe, and 3% are unsure. Safety assessments about concealed carrying have gone back-and-forth over the last several years with no clear trend. In 1996, 56% saw it as making things less safe; this fell to 47% in 1997-1998; then rose again to 54% in 1998; and fell again in 1999 to 45%. Among the mostly stable gun attitudes and behaviors, this has been one of the most variable items.^U

Gun owners are more likely to believe that permissive concealed-carry laws will increase safety than did non-gun owners. Of those personally owning guns, 31% thought such laws would make it less safe, as did 53.5% of others in gun households and 51% of those without guns. Similarly, 32% of those who had ever bought a handgun believed it would be less safe compared to 49% of those who had never purchased a handgun. Likewise, 31% of those with both a handgun and a longgun in their household felt things would be less safe, as did 45% of those with only a handgun, and 43% of those with only a longgun.

Another factor explaining why people differ on whether permissive concealed-carry laws would promote or hinder safety, is its expected impact 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 21.5% of the public thinks gun-carrying would increase, 56% believe that it would remain the same, 18% that it would decrease, and 5% are unsure. This assessment has also been highly changeable. In 1998, 35% saw permissive concealed-carrying laws as increasing gun carrying, 44% saw no change, 17% saw it decreasing, and 3.5% were unsure. Of those who think gun-carrying would increase under permissive carry laws, only 26% believe such laws would make things safer; for those who think there would be no change in the level of gun-carrying, 47% think it would be safer; and for those who see gun-carrying as decreasing, 55% feel safety would increase.^V

^U For a debate on the impact of concealed-carry laws on crime rates, see refs. 49, 50, and 92.

^V Hemenway and Azrael found that 62% said they would feel less safe and 12% more safe if more people in their community began carrying guns.²⁴

Looking at these two gun-safety items jointly shows that 25% feel that both a gun in the home and allowing more guns on the streets improves safety;^w 26% take the opposite position, that guns in both cases decrease safety; 12.5% take the intermediate positions that a gun in the home increases safety, while allowing more carrying of guns decreases safety; and another 14.5% think homes with guns are less safe, but feel that allowing more concealed-carrying 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 (4%).^x

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, 19% feel that guns in the home make it less safe and 34% think that allowing more concealed carrying of guns would reduce safety. Among gun owners who did not acquire a gun for protection, 28% think homes are less safe with guns and 42% consider additional guns on the street as being more dangerous. Safety concerns are even less for those who carried guns for protection during the last year: 15% of gun carriers consider guns in the home less safe and 24% believe that permissive concealed-carrying laws would decrease safety.

Finally, many gun owners see protection against crime as a reason for having a gun. About two-fifths of people in households with guns have acquired their weapons “at least in part, for protection against crime.”^y This level has varied slightly but shows no clear trend over the last several years (40% in 1996, 43% in 1997-1998, 39% in 1998, 42% in 1999). Personal gun owners are more likely to report that a gun was obtained for anti-crime purposes than others in households with guns (47.5% vs. 30%; prob.=.000). Anti-crime protection is mentioned by 74% of those in households with only a handgun, by 58% in households with both handguns and longguns, and by 15% in households with only longguns.^z

Concerns about Being Around Guns

Parents are concerned about having their children being around guns.^{AA} People with children under 18 years of age were asked if they would let their child “play in or visit” a house having a handgun

^w These 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.

^x On the impact of general gun control and concealed-carry laws on crime and suicide, see refs. 39-40, 44-46, 49-50, 53, 92.

^y The National Opinion Survey on Crime and Justice¹ found that 45% said sport was the “main reason” for having a gun, 20% said protection against crime, 27% both, and 8% neither. A survey of parents⁶⁷ in 1998 found that 52% mentioned hunting, 20% protection, 26% recreational and target shooting, and 15% other (numbers total to more than 100% due to multiple mentions).

^z On the aggregate-level relationship between crime and gun ownership, see ref. 83.

^{AA} See also ref. 67 on parents and guns. On the safe storage of firearms, see refs. 93 and 25.

present: 70% approved if the handgun was both “unloaded and locked away,” 33% if the handgun was “loaded but is locked away,” and 8% if the handgun was “loaded and not locked way.” Parental views on allowing their child to go to a home with an unloaded and locked gun or with a loaded and unlocked gun have not changed over time, but approval of a child going to a home with a loaded, but locked, gun has dropped from 43.5% in 1997-1998, to 38% in 1998, and to 33% in 1999 (prob.=.000). In addition, on 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.”

Gun-owning parents are less opposed to their children being around guns than parents without guns. Of parents who personally own a gun, 3% do not want their child to visit a household with a locked and unloaded handgun, 41% object if the handgun is loaded but locked away, and 77% are opposed if the handgun is loaded and unlocked. For parents living with, but not personally owning a gun, the respective objection levels are 14%, 50%, and 94%. For parents without guns in their household, opposition is 42%, 75%, and 95%. Similarly on NGPS-97, 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: 23% of parents who see guns as enhancing safety would object to a child’s visit to a household with a locked and unloaded gun compared to 37% of parents who think guns make a household less safe. If the gun is locked but loaded, opposition grows to 45% and 74%, and if the gun is loaded and unlocked, opposition climbs to 86% and 97%. Similarly on NGPS-97, 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.

Children and Guns

The presence of children in the household has only limited impact on how people think about and use firearms. The presence of children has little association with attitudes toward firearms regulation in general. The general firearms regulation and deny-guns-to-criminals scales are unrelated to the presence of children, and the gun-safety scale has an irregular association (Table 12). Parents are somewhat more supportive of childproofing firearms: 63% of those without children in the home strongly favor mandatory childproofing of handguns compared to 69% of parents (prob.=.000). But parents and non-parents do not differ on other questions dealing with children, such as gun-owner liability for misuse by children of unsafely stored guns and measures to restrict the use and ownership of guns to those 18 and older and of handguns to those 21 and older. Moreover, 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).

Gun ownership itself does not vary by the presence of children. The presence of a firearm in the household and whether the respondent personally owns a gun are unrelated to the presence of children, and having a handgun has an irregular relationship (Table 9B). Also, parental opposition to having their children visit in households that have guns does not vary by how many children are in the family.

Buying Personalized Guns

After informing respondents about what personalized weapons were and asking about support for requiring that all new handguns be personalized (Table 2), a number of experiments were conducted to see what people's purchasing plans would be regarding personalized handguns under different cost and availability scenarios and what their views on various public policies relating to personalized handguns would be. First, people were asked the following:

It is expected that within three years, several types of personalized handguns will be available for sale from gun shops. It's expected that the new devices will add about [X dollars] to the price of handguns. New handguns now range in price from \$125 to more than \$1000. If these new personalized handguns were now available for sale, which of the following seems most likely:

1. I would *not* buy a firearm of any type.
2. I would purchase a personalized handgun.
3. I would purchase a handgun that was not personalized.
4. I would purchase a non-personalized rifle or shotgun.

Random thirds of the sample were told that the personalized guns would increase costs by \$100, \$150, or \$200. As the price is raised, three shifts in buying intentions occur. First, people intending to buy no weapon rose as the personalized guns become more expensive: 59.7% would make no purchase if personalization increased cost by \$100; 60.8% if it was \$150; and 64.2% if it cost \$200 more. Second, the percent purchasing a personalized gun falls as the price rises: 22.8% at \$100 cost increase, 18.4% at \$150, and 14.0% at \$200. Third, purchases of non-personalized handguns rose as the price of personalized guns did: 5.9% if \$100 more, 8.7% if \$150, and 9.9% if \$200. Finally, purchases of longguns showed no clear pattern: 8.1% if \$100 more, 10.5% if \$150, and 8.8% if \$200. Clearly price makes a difference, and lower prices for personalized handguns would both expand handgun sales and shift purchases from traditional to personalized handguns.

Next, people's initial intentions were further tested by varying the likely price of personalized guns in follow-up questions:

Those indicating that they would purchase a traditional handgun or did not know what they would do were asked, "*Do you think you would buy a personalized handgun within the next 12 months if the personalization devices added only [X dollars] to the price of a handgun?*" The additional cost mentioned was half the previously mentioned price—\$50, \$75, or \$100. The price decrease moved a small additional group into the personalized gun market, but the absolute discounted price did not seem to matter. Of those who were told that the added price was \$50, 13.0% indicated they would now buy a personalized handgun, as would 10.8% of those for \$75 more, and 16.3% for \$100 more (prob.=.618).

Those indicating that they would buy a personalized handgun were asked, “*Do you think that you would be likely to buy a new personalized handgun if the personalization device added about [X dollars] to the price of a new handgun?*” Each person was given a new price that was twice the previously mentioned price—\$200, \$300, or \$400. This naturally discouraged purchases, although it was virtually the same for all prices: 30.2% dropping their purchase if the cost was \$200 more, 33.1% if \$300 more, and 29.4% if \$400 more (prob.=.263).

Those indicating they would buy a non-personalized handgun or did not know what they would do were presented another hypothetical situation. They were asked:

In answering this next question, suppose that in 2 years all new handguns sold in the United States were personalized and that the personalized devices added about [X dollars] to the price of most handguns. Under these new conditions, which of the following do you think you would do after you could no longer buy a new handgun that was not personalized?

1. Buy a new personalized handgun.
2. Buy a used non-personalized handgun.
3. Buy a rifle or shotgun.
4. Not buy any type of firearms.

Each person was told the same price as in the original question (\$100, \$150, or \$200). In this follow-up question the change was not in price, but in the non-availability of new, traditional handguns. In response to the question, the original (and repeated) price did not make a statistically significant difference. At each price a plurality stuck with their initial preference for a traditional handgun by opting for a used weapon (42.2% overall, 38.7% if \$100 more, 43.7% if \$150 more, and 44.9% if \$200 more). Another 26.4% now would not buy a gun, 12.0% would switch to personalized handguns, 8.4% to longguns, and 11.0% were unsure.

The follow-up items confirm that intended purchases of personalized handguns are price-elastic. However, in the follow-up questions the absolute difference in the revised prices has no discernable impact. The changes in purchasing plans do not vary across prices, presumably because the increases and decreases were all proportional to the initial price (i.e., halving or doubling it). Also, the non-traditional-guns scenario indicates that forced substitution would scatter those who preferred to buy new, non-personalized guns in various directions.

The next questions in the personalized handgun experiments deal with changes in public policy rather than merely with market availability. The first public policy item asks:

Suppose that the government required everyone to pay an extra [X dollars] in taxes each year to enforce a new law requiring that all new guns be sold with personalized handgun technology. Would you favor or oppose the law?

Random thirds were told that the taxes would be \$25, \$50, or \$100. Most people opposed such a law and opposition modestly, but not significantly, increased with the tax burden (59.9% opposed if tax were \$25, 62.8% if \$50, and 66.0% if \$100; prob.=.162).

Then, people who favored the law were asked if they would support or oppose it if the tax was twice as much (\$50, \$100, or \$200), and people who were opposed were asked if they would support or oppose it if the tax was only half as much (\$12.50, \$25, or \$50). The doubling of the taxes persuaded 25.8% of initial supporters to join the opposition, and this did not vary by the absolute amount of the revised tax burden (22.7% if tax were \$50, 27.9% if \$100, and 27.7% if \$200; prob.=.926). The halving of the estimated tax moved very few (10.3%) into supporting the law, and this also did not vary by the absolute revised tax figure (12.7% if tax were \$12.50, 9.3% if \$25, and 8.7% if \$50; prob.=.073).

In another follow-up question, those who opposed the taxes were asked:

Suppose the government was going to offer a tax refund of [X dollars] to citizens to compensate them for implementation of this new law. Would you favor or oppose a law that required that all handguns be sold with personalized handgun technology if that would mean that you received a [X-dollar] tax refund per year?

Random thirds were told the tax refunds were \$25, \$50, or \$100. This rebate proposal moved almost a third (31.5%) of the opponents into supporting the law. The amount of the tax refund did not make a difference (% favoring: 29.3% at \$25 refund, 34.0% at \$50, and 31.1% at \$100; prob.= .382).

The initial tax refund question was then followed by items in which the amount of the refund was halved for those now supporting the law and doubled for those still opposing the law. Halving the tax refund led 9.9% to drop their support, and this did not vary by absolute amount (% no longer supporting law: 83.9% at \$12.50 refund, 93.0% at \$25; and 92.2% at \$50; prob.=.274). Doubling the tax refund moved only 6.1% of opponents to support the law, and this did not vary by absolute amount (% now supporting the law: 3.1% at \$50 refund, 11.0% at \$100, and 4.1% at \$200; prob.=.070).

In response to the various proposed public policies on personalized guns, people showed only limited sensitivity to costs. Varying the amount of taxes and tax refunds had no statistically significant impact, although in some instances the pattern did indicate responsiveness to price. The clearer impact of price was the larger shift toward support when tax refunds were substituted for tax increases.

Finally, people were asked about how the availability of personalized guns would change their gun-using behavior. Of those who indicated they would purchase a personalized handgun, 54% would store the weapons in the safest of ways, locked away and unloaded; 25.5% would lock it away, but keep it loaded; 8.5% would keep it unloaded, but not locked away; 9% would have it in the least safe condition, loaded and not locked away; and 3% were unsure.

Of those who already had a handgun and who indicated that they would purchase a personalized handgun, few would make changes regarding their non-personalized handguns: 82% said they would

keep their handguns and store them as they currently do; 4% would sell or give away their old handguns; 12% would give or sell the gun to the police; and 2% are unsure.

CONCLUSIONS

Americans favor all measures to regulate firearms short of prohibiting guns in general. First, 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. Second, when it comes to firearms, most people's motto appears to be "safety first." Gun safety is a concern of the vast majority of people and safety measures, from technological innovations such as personalized handguns, to requiring safety training, to mandatory safe storage are very popular. Third, people want to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and to punish those who misuse guns. Finally, attitudes toward guns and gun control are generally stable, and pro-gun-control opinion is even more firmly grounded in thought and action than is the opposition.

Table 1 Support for General Gun Control Measures^a	
Tamper-resistant serial numbers on guns (97-98)	89.6%
Police permit needed before gun may be purchased (GSS)	82.0
Mandatory background check and 5-day waiting period	80.7
Mandatory registration of handguns	80.0
Must be 21+ to buy handgun	79.9
Require background check for private sales	78.6
Restrict handgun ammunition like handguns themselves	73.4
Willing to pay \$25 in taxes to reduce gun injuries (97-98)	71.4
Keep guns from criminals, even if harder for law-abiding	69.8
Prohibit import of guns not allowed in country of origin (98)	69.2
Ban all high-capacity ammunition magazines	66.6
Handgun owners must at least be licensed and trained	65.7 ^b
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	61.3
Concealed-carrying only for those with special needs	55.9
Prohibit importing guns (98)	55.1
Ban "Saturday night specials" (98)	54.2-58.2 ^c
General concealed-carrying laws make it less safe	45.2
Ban possession of handguns, except police/authorized (98)	38.5
Total ban on handguns	12.8 ^b
Sources: NGPS-99; NGPS-98; NGPS-97; GSS-98	
^a All results are from the latest, 1999, survey except as marked otherwise.	
^b 12.8% wanted a "total ban of handgun ownership" and 52.9% said that "handgun owners should be licensed by the government and complete mandatory training." 65.7% favored licensing or a more stringent measure.	
^c See alternative wordings below.	

Table 1 (Continued)

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)

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)

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?

Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose making the minimum legal age for purchasing a handgun 21 years old?

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?

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.

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?

Table 1 (Continued)

Question Wordings:

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?

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?

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? (NGPS-98)

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 above.)

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 above.)

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 General Gun Safety Measures^a

Require federal handgun safety standards	94.1%
Federal handgun safety standards even if more expensive	86.3
Require that all new handguns be childproof	85.6
Gun buyers must take gun-safety course	84.7
Require that new handguns have magazine safety (97-98)	81.9
Manufacturers liable for injuries from defects in guns (97-98)	79.3
Make owners liable for injuries if gun not stored to prevent misuse by children	76.2
Guns must be stored in locked box or cabinet	74.1
Guns must be stored unloaded	73.9
Require that all new handguns have load indicator (97-98)	73.2
Guns must be stored with trigger lock	72.8
Current gun owners must take gun-safety course	68.3
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	66.2
Require that all new handguns be personalized	63.4
Current gun owners who won't take gun-safety course be required to turn in their guns	49.3
Pay \$50 in taxes to enforce personalized handgun law	34.4
Sources: NGPS-99; NGPS-98; NGPS-97	
^a All results are from the latest, 1999, survey except as marked otherwise.	

Table 2 (Continued)

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?

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?

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

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)

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)

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 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.

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? (97-98)

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

Table 2 (Continued)

Question Wordings:

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

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?

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?

Suppose that the government required everyone to pay an extra \$50 in taxes each year to enforce a new law requiring that all new guns be sold with personalized handgun technology. Would you favor or oppose the law? (Different tax amounts were inserted in random sub-samples, see subsequent discussion of these experiments.)

Table 3	
Attitudes to Denying Guns to Criminals	
A. % for Prohibiting Gun Purchases to Criminals	
<i>Convicted of...</i>	
Domestic violence	90.4
Drunk and disorderly conduct (97-98)	83.6
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	82.6
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	81.8
Driving under the influence of alcohol	66.5
B. % for Wait and \$25 Fee to pay for Background Checks	78.9
Sources: NGPS-99; 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.

You said that you felt that people who were convicted of [READ WHICHEVER MEASURES THEY JUST ENDORSED] should not be able to purchase a handgun. To allow checks to ensure that people who were convicted of these crimes did not buy handguns, would you support or oppose a requirement that all people wanting to buy a handgun had to pay a \$25 fee and wait two weeks while a criminal background check was carried out? [Those who opposed any purchase restrictions are maintained in the base and counted as opposing this measure.]

Table 4 Attitudes Toward Illegal Gun Usages % Agreeing	
Double sentence if gun used during crime	78.2
Treat illegal gun possession as a serious crime	81.6
Source: NGPS-99	

Question Wording:

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

- a. If a gun is used during a crime, the sentence for the crime should be twice as long.
- b. The illegal possession of a gun should be treated as a serious crime like a robbery or burglary.

Table 5 Measures to Curb School Violence % Favoring Measure	
Expelling threatening, violent, and unstable students	81.0
Metal detectors and guards in all schools	73.5
Prohibit ownership/use of firearms if under 18	68.0
Prohibit guns in homes with anyone under 18	29.1
Source: NGPS-99	

Question Wording:

Over the last several years, there have been a number of school shootings. Do you favor or oppose the following measures to reduce these and other examples of gun violence by youths:

- a. Prohibiting those under 18 from owning or using firearms
- b. Prohibiting guns in households with anyone under the age of 18
- c. Having metal detectors and security guards in all middle schools and high schools
- d. Screening and expelling any students making threats, acting violently, or being mentally unstable

**Table 6
Trends in Attitudes Towards Guns**

	1996	1997/98	1998	1999	Change ^a 1999 - First
A. Support for Gun-Control Measures					
Police permit before purchase ^b	80.3	----	82.0	----	+ 1.7*
Mandatory background check and 5-day waiting period	----	----	85.3	80.7	- 4.6*
Mandatory registration of handguns	81.3	81.5	85.3	80.0	- 1.3*
Checks on private sales of guns	77.4	----	79.5	78.6	+ 1.2**
Restrictions on sale of ammunition	----	77.5	76.8	73.4	- 4.1
Keep guns from criminals, even if harder for law-abiding	78.3	70.1	75.3	69.8	- 8.5**
Ban all high-capacity ammunition magazines	----	----	73.2	66.6	- 6.6**
Handgun owners must at least be licensed and trained	69.8	64.1	69.6	65.7	- 4.1*
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	66.3	62.6	72.3	61.3	- 5.0**
Concealed carrying only for those with special needs	53.5	57.9	59.8	55.9	+ 2.4*
General concealed carrying laws make it less safe	55.7	47.4	53.6	45.2	-10.5**
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	12.8	- 3.3*
B. Support for Gun-Safety Measures and Beliefs					
Require federal handgun safety standards	----	93.6	94.9	94.1	+0.5
Gun buyers must take gun-safety course	----	----	90.1	84.7	- 5.4**
Federal handgun safety standards even if more expensive	----	85.7	89.8	86.3	+ 0.6*
Require that all new handguns be childproof	85.8	87.5	87.9	85.6	- 0.2**
Make owners liable for injuries if gun not stored to prevent misuse by children	----	----	79.6	76.2	- 3.4**

Table 6 (Continued)					
	1996	1997/98	1998	1999	Change^a 1999 - First
Guns must be stored in locked box or cabinet	----	----	73.7	74.1	+0.4
Guns must be stored unloaded	----	----	78.4	73.9	- 4.5
Guns must be stored with trigger lock	----	----	76.8	72.8	- 4.0*
Current gun owners must take gun-safety course	----	----	76.7	68.3	- 8.4**
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	74.6	67.8	74.9	66.2	- 8.4**
Requiring that all new handguns be personalized	68.0	71.4	69.8	63.4	- 4.6**
Current gun owners who won't take gun-safety course be required to turn in their guns	----	----	55.1	49.3	- 5.8*
C. Prohibiting Gun Purchases to Criminals Convicted of...					
Domestic violence	----	89.2	90.1	90.4	+ 1.2*
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	85.4	82.9	84.3	82.6	- 2.8
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	77.9	84.5	80.9	81.8	+ 3.9**
Driving under the influence of alcohol	63.1	70.6	68.1	66.5	+ 3.4*
Wait and \$25 fee to pay for background checks	----	----	85.1	78.9	- 6.2**
D. Illegal Gun Use					
Double sentence if gun used during crime	----	----	82.8	78.2	- 4.6**
Treat illegal gun possession as a serious crime	----	----	84.7	81.6	- 3.1**

Table 6 (Continued)					
	1996	1997/98	1998	1999	Change^a 1999 - First
E. Miscellaneous Beliefs and Issues					
Business should prohibit carrying of concealed weapons on premises	----	----	83.2	75.8	- 7.4**
Manufacturers liable for gun misuse	----	----	36.9	39.9	+ 3.0**
Congress should hold hearings on gun industry	----	----	75.3	74.5	- 0.8
Home less safe with handgun	43.4	45.4	46.4	43.2	- 0.2**
Sources: NGPS-96, NGPS 97-98, NGPS-98, NGPS-99, GSS 94-98					
^a Change across all years asked. % change from first to last year.					
^b GSS. Support for requiring a police permit grew from 77.9% in 1994 to 82.0% in 1998, prob.=.002. The item will be asked on the 2000 GSS.					
*overall change in distribution significant at .05-.002					
**overall change in distribution significant at .001 or less					

Question Wordings:

See Tables 1-4 for items in sections A-D. Items in section E listed below.

Do you think that public places, such as stores, movie theaters, and restaurants, should allow or prohibit people from carrying concealed weapons on their premises?

As you may know, currently some states are suing cigarette makers to recover some of the money the states paid for the medical care of smokers. If your state or city considers suing gun manufacturers for the medical costs of gun victims and gun injuries, would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose this action?

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 past 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?

Do you think that a gun usually makes a home much safer, safer, less safe, or much less safe?

Table 7
Pre- and Post-Littleton Attitudes Towards Guns

Harris: In general, would you say you favor stricter gun control, or less strict gun control?			
	April 1998	June 1999	
Stricter	69%	63%	
Less strict	23	25	
Neither	7	10	
Not sure	1	2	
	(1011)	(1006)	
Harris: In general, do you favor stricter gun control or less strict laws relating to the control of handguns?			
	April 1998	June 1999	
Stricter	76%	73%	
Less strict	19	25	
Neither	5	5	
Not sure	*	2	
	(1011)	(1006)	
AP: Which of these do you think is more likely to decrease gun violence? Better enforcement of existing gun laws or tougher gun laws.			
	4/16-19/99	4/28-5/2/99	8/99
Better enforcement	47%	39%	49%
Tougher gun laws	42	51	43
Neither	—	—	5
Don't know	—	—	2
	(765)	(1006)	(1026)
AP: Do you favor stricter gun control laws or do you oppose them?			
	4/9-12/99	4/28-5/2/99	8/99
Favor	56%	64%	56%
Oppose	34	31	39
Don't know	10	5	5
	(1021)	(1006)	(1026)

Table 7 (Continued)

CBS/Gallup: In general, do you feel the laws covering the sale of handguns should be more strict, less strict, or kept as they are now?

	Gallup 2/99	CBS 8/99
More strict	68%	67%
Less strict	6	5
Kept as they are	25	23
Don't know	1	5
	(1054)	(736)

PSRA: Do you think stricter gun control laws would reduce the amount of violent crime in this country a lot, a little, or not at all?

	4/21-22/99	8/99
A lot	33%	33%
A little	38	35
Not at all	26	29
Don't know	3	3
	(757)	(753)

ABC/WP: Would you support or oppose a law requiring...a nation-wide ban on the sale of handguns, except to law enforcement officers?

CBS: Would you favor or oppose a ban on the sale of all handguns, except those issued to law enforcement officers?

	CBS 4/22/99	CBS 8/99	ABC/WP 8-9/99
Favor	43%	35%	32%
Oppose	53	61	65
No opinion	4	4	3
	(450)	(736)	(1526)

Table 7 (Continued)

Gallup: In general, do you feel that the laws covering the sale of firearms should be more strict, less strict, or kept as they are now?

	2/99	4/26-27/99	5/23-24/99	6/99	8/99
Stricter	60%	66%	65%	62%	66%
Less strict	29	25	28	31	27
Keep as now	9	5	5	6	6
Don't know	2	2	2	1	1
	(1054)	(1073)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)

ABC: Do you favor or oppose stricter gun control laws in this country? (If favor/oppose, ask:) Is that strongly or somewhat favor/oppose?

	5/99	8/99	8-9/99
Strongly favor	55%	46%	52%
Somewhat favor	12	16	11
Somewhat oppose	21	22	25
Strongly oppose	10	12	11
No opinion	1	3	2
	(761)	(1023)	(1526)

Gallup: Which of the following statements comes closest to your view. There should be no restrictions on owning guns; there should be minor restrictions—such as a five-day waiting period to buy a gun and gun registration; there should be major restrictions that would ban ownership of some guns altogether—such as handguns and certain semi-automatic rifles; or all guns should be illegal for everyone except police and authorized persons.

	2/99	4/26-27/99
None	5%	4%
Minor	37	30
SOME (Vol.)	0	4
Major	36	38
Ban	18	22
Don't know	4	2
	(1054)	(1073)

* less than 0.5%
NA = not available

Table 8
Pre- and Post-Littleton
Crime/Gun-Related Most Important Problem/Issue Mentions

	Guns/Gun Control	Crime/Violence
A. Harris		
1/99 - (1008)	1%	7%
2/99 - (1007)	1	8
4/8-13/99 - (1006)	1	7
5/14-19/99 - (1010)	10	19
6/99 - (1006)	9	14
8/99 - (1008)	9	13
B. Gallup		
1/99 - (1009)	*	13
5/23-24/99 - (1050)	10	17
C. CBS		
1/30-2/1/99 - (1058)	—	6
4/13-14/99 - (878)	—	4
4/22/99 - (450)	3	16
5/1-2/99 - (1151)	3	19
*less than 0.5% —not listed as a category		

Question Wordings:

Harris: What do you think are the two most important issues for the government to address?

Gallup/CBS: What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?

Table 9	
Levels and Distribution of Gun Ownership and Purchases	
A. Levels	
Have Gun in Household	39.9%
Respondent Owns Gun	27.2
Other Person Owns Gun	13.6
No Gun in Household	59.2 ^a
Have Handgun in Household	22.2
Respondent Owns Handgun	17.1
No Guns in Household	59.8 ^a
Handgun Only	5.6
Longgun Only	17.0
Both Types of Guns	17.6
Bought Handgun	21.1
Never Bought Handgun	77.8
Refused, etc.	1.1
Source: NGPS-99	
^a These numbers differ slightly because of a few missing cases being excluded from second set of numbers.	

Table 9 (Continued)

B. Ownership by Socio-Demographics			
	Gun in Household	Handgun in Household	Personally Owns Gun
Men	45.2%	26.1%	44.4%
Women	35.1**	18.6**	11.6**
Northeast	26.9	15.1	21.0
Midwest	46.9	17.0	29.7
South	43.5	26.5	29.0
West	38.5**	26.7*	27.1**
Rural	66.7	34.7	43.7
Town, Small City	43.2	21.3	26.8
Suburb	26.7	17.2	21.2
Large City	28.9**	18.6**	20.9**
Married	50.6	28.1	33.4
Divorced	27.4	18.4	22.5
Separated	28.4	26.7	28.9
Widowed	33.3	13.2	21.1
Never married	24.5**	13.2**	17.6**
Less than high school	43.9	20.4	32.2
High school	43.3	21.4	28.8
College	37.8	24.4	24.8
Greater than college	34.2	19.4	25.8
\$0-9,999	26.6	15.0	21.0
\$10,000-19,999	38.1	17.5	27.4
\$20,000-29,999	43.0	16.1	29.1
\$30,000-39,999	40.4	20.0	28.8
\$40,000-49,999	40.3	20.3	20.1
\$50,000-59,999	51.5	41.7	35.8
\$60,000-79,999	44.6	24.3	33.0
\$80,000+	37.9**	24.5**	31.5*

Table 9 (Continued)

	Gun in Household	Handgun in Household	Personally Owns Gun
Less than 30 years old	30.6	12.9	21.1
30-39	37.9	21.8	23.2
40-49	45.8	21.5	29.5
50-65	47.5	30.2	33.1
65+	40.2**	26.0**	31.8*
No children in home	40.1	23.6	28.5
1 child	37.8	21.5	23.5
2 children	41.3	15.3	23.2
3 children	35.7	14.3	22.4
4+ children	49.8	38.7**	41.1
Republican	47.3	25.7	34.8
Independent	42.6	23.1	28.8
Democrat	31.7**	18.6*	20.4**
Liberal	29.6	15.5	19.7
Moderate	44.2	25.9	31.6
Conservative	41.3**	22.6*	27.0*

Source: NGPS-99

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

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

Table 10
The Ownership of Guns

A. Trends in Gun Ownership - Overall			
	% 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	40.7	28.5
1996a	43.4	40.2	27.2
1996b	42.3	39.1	30.8
1997	38.6	37.4	28.7
1998a	36.8	34.9	22.5
1998b	37.8	34.5	25.4
1999	39.9	35.8	27.2

Table 10 (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
1999	22.2	33.5

Sources: GSS=1973-1996a, 1998a; NGPS-96=1996b; NGPS-97=1997;
NGPS-98=1998; NGPS -99=1999

Table 11
Attitudes Towards Guns by Gun Ownership

	Personally Owns Gun	Gun in Household	No Gun in Household	No Gun—Personally Owns Gun	Prob. ^a
A. Support for Gun-Control Measures					
Police permit before purchase ^b	66.0%	79.9%	88.2%	22.2%	.000
Mandatory background check and 5-day waiting period	73.9	88.1	83.5	9.6	.005
Mandatory registration of handguns	64.6	89.2	85.7	21.1	.000
Checks on private sales of guns	66.0	88.0	83.4	17.4	.000
Restrictions on sale of ammunition	52.1	72.6	85.1	33.0	.000
Keep guns from criminals, even if harder for law-abiding	45.5	76.1	81.5	36.0	.000
Ban all high-capacity ammunition magazines	56.2	66.4	72.5	16.3	.000
Handgun owners must at least be licensed and trained	42.4	67.2	77.3	34.9	.000
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	36.7	65.6	73.2	36.5	.000
Concealed carrying only for those with special needs	35.9	56.1	66.2	30.3	.000
General concealed carrying laws make it less safe	31.4	53.5	50.8	19.4	.000
Ban possession of handguns, except police/authorized (98)	10.3	30.5	53.2	42.9	.000
Total ban on handguns	3.9	7.3	18.8	14.9	.000
B. Support for Gun-Safety Measures and Beliefs					
Require federal handgun safety standards	90.8	94.2	95.0	4.2	.235
Gun buyers must take gun-safety course	76.7	82.6	89.1	12.4	.000
Federal handgun safety standards even if more expensive	85.5	91.4	85.5	0.0	.026
Require that all new handguns be childproof	75.4	88.7	90.4	15.0	.000
Make owners liable for injuries if gun not stored to prevent misuse by children	69.5	71.6	81.3	11.8	.000
Guns must be stored in locked box or cabinet	56.6	76.6	82.8	26.2	.000
Guns must be stored unloaded	62.1	79.9	79.5	17.4	.000

Table 11 (Continued)					
	Personally Owns Gun	Gun in Household	No Gun in Household	No Gun—Personally Owns Gun	Prob.^a
Guns must be stored with trigger lock	50.4%	72.6%	84.6%	34.2%	.000
Current gun owners must take gun-safety course	49.3	69.9	78.1	28.8	.000
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	51.7	63.6	73.9	22.2	.000
Requiring that all new handguns be personalized	51.1	67.5	69.4	18.3	.000
Current gun owners who won't take gun-safety course be required to turn in their guns	23.2	48.7	63.0	39.8	.000
C. Prohibiting Gun Purchases to Criminals Convicted of...					
Domestic violence	80.9	92.9	95.6	14.7	.000
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	69.7	80.0	90.6	20.9	.000
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	68.3	83.2	88.8	20.5	.000
Driving under the influence of alcohol	51.2	69.2	74.1	22.9	.000
Wait and \$25 fee to pay for background checks	79.5	82.5	84.6	5.1	.107
D. Illegal Gun Use					
Double sentence if gun used during crime	79.8	81.8	76.7	- 3.1	.449
Treat illegal gun possession as a serious crime	74.5	86.0	84.7	10.2	.034
E. Miscellaneous Beliefs and Issues					
Business should prohibit carrying of concealed weapons on premises	63.2	76.0	83.2	20.0	.000
Manufacturers liable for gun misuse	18.3	40.3	51.0	36.7	.000
Congress should hold hearings on gun industry	53.8	81.4	84.2	30.4	.000
Home less safe with handgun	14.6	43.8	57.5	42.9	.000
Sources: NGPS-96, NGPS 97-98, NGPS-98, NGPS-99, GSS 1994-98					
^a Probability levels are based on the entire distributions, not just the proportions displayed above.					

Question Wordings: See Tables 1-4,6

Table 12
Attitudes Toward Guns by Socio-Demographics

	General Firearm Regulation	Gun Safety Measures	Barring Guns to Criminals
Men	6.3	7.4	2.9
Women	7.7**	8.7**	3.5**
Northeast	7.3	8.6	3.3
Midwest	7.0	7.9	3.0
South	7.0	7.9	3.3
West	7.0	8.1*	3.1**
Rural	6.0	7.1	3.0
Town, small city	7.2	8.2	3.2
Suburb	7.4	8.4	3.3
Large city	7.3**	8.4**	3.3*
Married	6.9	7.7	3.1
Divorced	7.3	8.8	3.1
Separated	7.0	8.7	3.4
Widowed	7.2	8.1	3.7
Never married	7.3	8.4**	3.2**
Less than high school	6.5	7.7	3.4
High school	6.8	8.1	3.2
College	7.3	8.2	3.2
Greater than college	7.4**	7.9	3.1*
\$0-9,999	6.6	7.6	3.4
\$10,000-19,999	7.1	8.6	3.3
\$20,000-29,999	6.7	8.0	3.0
\$30,000-39,999	6.9	7.8	3.1
\$40,000-49,999	7.0	8.1	3.2
\$50,000-59,999	7.2	8.2	3.3
\$60,000-79,999	7.3	8.3	3.2
\$80,000+	7.2	8.0	3.1

Table 12 (Continued)			
	General Firearm Regulation	Gun Safety Measures	Barring Guns to Criminals
Less than 30 years old	7.1	8.5	3.0
30-39	7.2	8.3	3.2
40-49	6.9	8.0	3.2
50-65	6.8	7.6	3.2
65+	7.3	7.9*	3.6**
No children in home	7.0	7.9	3.2
1 child	7.5	8.5	3.2
2 children	7.0	8.4	3.2
3 children	7.0	8.3	3.2
4+ children	6.0*	7.5*	3.3
Republican	6.7	7.4	3.2
Independent	6.8	8.0	3.1
Democrat	7.6**	8.7**	3.4**
Liberal	7.6	8.6	3.3
Moderate	7.2	8.2	3.2
Conservative	6.7**	7.6**	3.2
Source: NGPS-99			
*overall differences in means significant at .05-.002			
**overall differences in means significant at .001 or less			

Table 13
Gender Differences in Attitudes Towards and Use of Guns

	Men	Women	Probability
A. Support for Gun-Control Measures			
Police permit before purchase	77.0	85.9	.000
Mandatory background check and 5-day waiting period	74.6	86.3	.000
Mandatory registration of handguns	74.2	84.4	.000
Checks on private sales of guns	72.9	83.9	.000
Restrictions on sale of ammunition	63.3	82.8	.000
Keep guns from criminals, even if harder for law-abiding	61.5	75.6	.000
Ban all high-capacity ammunition magazines	59.6	73.1	.000
Handgun owners must at least be licensed and trained	54.1	76.5	.000
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	50.4	71.3	.000
Concealed carrying only for those with special needs	49.2	62.1	.000
General concealed carrying laws make it less safe	38.6	51.2	.000
Ban possession of handguns, except police/authorized (98)	26.1	50.0	.000
Total ban on handguns	8.7	16.5	.000
B. Support for Gun-Safety Measures and Beliefs			
Require federal handgun safety standards	92.4	94.8	.374
Gun buyers must take gun-safety course	81.1	88.0	.000
Federal handgun safety standards even if more expensive	85.8	86.6	.401
Require that all new handguns be childproof	79.9	90.9	.000
Make owners liable for injuries if gun not stored to prevent misuse by children	73.0	78.8	.006
Guns must be stored in locked box or cabinet	64.9	82.5	.000
Guns must be stored unloaded	68.7	78.7	.000
Guns must be stored with trigger lock	61.5	83.1	.000
Current gun owners must take gun-safety course	60.4	75.7	.000

Table 13 (Continued)			
	Men	Women	Probability
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	59.8	72.1	.000
Requiring that all new handguns be personalized	58.5	67.9	.000
Current gun owners who won't take gun-safety course be required to turn in their guns	38.8	58.9	.000
C. Prohibiting Gun Purchases to Criminals Convicted of...			
Domestic violence	83.4	96.9	.000
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	79.2	85.8	.020
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	72.4	90.6	.000
Driving under the influence of alcohol	53.2	78.7	.000
Wait and \$25 fee to pay for background checks	74.8	82.7	.000
D. Illegal Gun Use			
Double sentence if gun used during crime	78.1	78.2	.002
Treat illegal gun possession as a serious crime	76.7	86.1	.000
E. Miscellaneous Beliefs and Issues			
Business should prohibit carrying of concealed weapons on premises	68.5	82.6	.000
Manufacturers liable for gun misuse	29.3	49.7	.000
Congress should hold hearings on gun industry	63.1	84.9	.000
Home less safe with handgun	30.9	54.5	.000
Sources: NGPS-98, NGPS-99, GSS-98			

Question Wordings: See Tables 1-4,6

Table 14					
Community Type Differences in Attitudes Toward and Use of Guns					
	Rural	Town, Small City	Suburbs	Big City	Prob.
A. Support for Gun-Control Measures					
Police permit before purchase	72.2	79.1	82.5	85.5	.000
Mandatory background check and 5-day waiting period	73.9	80.6	83.8	83.0	.042
Mandatory registration of handguns	66.7	83.9	84.6	81.0	.000
Checks on private sales of guns	72.9	77.6	86.1	79.0	.008
Restrictions on sale of ammunition	62.2	74.0	77.2	77.3	.003
Keep guns from criminals, even if harder for law-abiding	62.1	72.1	69.4	73.2	.012
Ban all high-capacity ammunition magazines	61.3	65.3	67.7	71.0	.015
Handgun owners must at least be licensed and trained	52.9	66.4	65.5	73.6	.000
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	48.7	61.1	69.4	63.7	.000
Concealed carrying only for those with special needs	43.1	59.7	57.0	59.7	.004
General concealed carrying laws make it less safe	34.0	47.3	49.1	47.5	.004
Total ban on handguns	7.5	12.8	12.9	16.2	.000
B. Support for Gun-Safety Measures and Beliefs					
Require federal handgun safety standards	90.1	92.6	95.5	95.8	.015
Gun buyers must take gun-safety course	77.1	85.9	89.9	84.5	.025
Federal handgun safety standards even if more expensive	85.2	82.6	91.9	87.0	.001
Require that all new handguns be childproof	79.6	84.3	88.7	89.1	.067
Make owners liable for injuries if gun not stored to prevent misuse by children	69.3	73.8	80.4	79.9	.002
Guns must be stored in locked box or cabinet	63.8	75.8	75.4	77.6	.000

Table 14 (Continued)					
	Rural	Town, Small City	Suburbs	Big City	Prob.
Guns must be stored unloaded	71.5	78.1	69.9	73.5	.099
Guns must be stored with trigger lock	59.7	74.7	76.3	76.4	.000
Current gun owners must take gun-safety course	54.3	67.7	74.6	73.9	.000
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	57.0	66.2	70.1	69.3	.045
Requiring that all new handguns be personalized	53.5	66.4	63.1	66.8	.004
Current gun owners who won't take gun-safety course be required to turn in their guns	35.1	50.9	54.2	53.3	.000
C. Prohibiting Gun Purchases to Criminals Convicted of...					
Domestic violence	85.4	91.1	93.0	90.9	.144
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	78.5	81.4	84.9	84.9	.077
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	73.3	85.7	83.6	81.7	.001
Driving under the influence of alcohol	62.1	64.2	70.4	69.2	.183
Wait and \$25 fee to pay for background checks	69.0	78.0	85.4	81.6	.000
D. Illegal Gun Use					
Double sentence if gun used during crime	75.9	84.3	77.7	75.7	.059
Treat illegal gun possession as a serious crime	76.6	82.2	85.0	82.4	.144
E. Miscellaneous Beliefs and Issues					
Business should prohibit carrying of concealed weapons on premises	68.0	79.5	73.3	78.7	.061
Manufacturers liable for gun misuse	31.6	40.7	38.0	45.9	.064
Congress should hold hearings on gun industry	65.7	76.7	73.6	78.6	.000
Home less safe with handgun	30.5	41.3	49.1	49.8	.004
Sources: NGPS-96, NGPS 97-98, NGPS-98, NGPS-99, GSS 94-98					

Question Wordings: See Tables 1-4,6

The categories for all items except the police permit item are based on self-classification into eight categories that are collapsed into the following four groups: Rural=farm or open country; Town, Small City=less than 50,000; Suburbs=suburb of a city 50,000+; and Big City=50,000+. For the police permit item from GSS—98 there were 10 categories based on Census classification of place of interview that are collapsed into four groups: Rural=open country, incorporated area less than 2,500 population; Town, Small City=population less than 50,000 and outside metropolitan area; Suburbs=part of metropolitan area, but not central city; and Big City=central city 50,000+.

Table 15
Regional Differences in Attitudes Toward and Use of Guns

	Northeast	Midwest	South	West	Prob.
A. Support for Gun-Control Measures					
Police permit before purchase	89.2	78.9	79.7	82.3	.001
Mandatory background check and 5-day waiting period	82.9	79.0	78.9	83.4	.290
Mandatory registration of handguns	76.9	80.6	80.2	81.9	.744
Checks on private sales of guns	81.0	78.5	78.5	76.9	.747
Restrictions on sale of ammunition	79.8	67.3	74.0	73.5	.000
Keep guns from criminals, even if harder for law-abiding	73.4	71.0	69.7	65.7	.244
Ban all high-capacity ammunition magazines	63.8	66.2	65.3	71.5	.209
Handgun owners must at least be licensed and trained	77.2	62.1	61.4	66.8	.114
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	66.8	56.5	63.7	57.5	.033
Concealed carrying only for those with special needs	54.6	64.6	51.5	55.1	.016
General concealed carrying laws make it less safe	46.2	49.7	42.8	43.3	.063
Ban possession of handguns, except police/authorized (98)	54.3	40.9	33.8	29.7	.001
Total ban on handguns	16.3	12.5	11.9	11.2	.114
B. Support for Gun-Safety Measures and Beliefs					
Require federal handgun safety standards	95.5	94.4	93.7	91.1	.530
Gun buyers must take gun-safety course	87.4	83.7	83.4	85.5	.714
Federal handgun safety standards even if more expensive	87.2	89.3	83.8	86.2	.180
Require that all new handguns be childproof	88.8	85.4	84.4	85.2	.231
Make owners liable for injuries if gun not stored to prevent misuse by children	78.4	76.8	70.7	81.8	.109

Table 15 (Continued)					
	Northeast	Midwest	South	West	Prob.
Guns must be stored in locked box or cabinet	79.6	71.2	72.7	74.5	.092
Guns must be stored unloaded	77.0	77.3	70.7	72.8	.270
Guns must be stored with trigger lock	78.4	70.6	71.0	73.0	.452
Current gun owners must take gun-safety course	79.1	60.7	67.6	67.9	.002
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	69.4	64.0	65.5	66.8	.115
Requiring that all new handguns be personalized	67.3	65.4	61.3	61.4	.399
Current gun owners who won't take gun-safety course be required to turn in their guns	61.3	41.8	49.5	46.0	.002
C. Prohibiting Gun Purchases to Criminals Convicted of...					
Domestic violence	91.2	88.6	92.1	88.8	.294
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	86.2	79.5	85.3	78.4	.146
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	84.9	75.3	85.8	79.6	.002
Driving under the influence of alcohol	71.5	61.1	69.9	62.3	.004
Wait and \$25 fee to pay for background checks	82.2	80.7	73.7	82.4	.030
D. Illegal Gun Use					
Double sentence if gun used during crime	80.1	79.2	77.4	76.8	.001
Treat illegal gun possession as a serious crime	84.6	84.2	79.4	80.0	.180

Table 15 (Continued)					
	Northeast	Midwest	South	West	Prob.
E. Miscellaneous Beliefs and Issues					
Business should prohibit carrying of concealed weapons on premises	71.2	80.4	77.4	72.5	.159
Manufacturers liable for gun misuse	47.3	40.2	34.9	40.9	.059
Congress should hold hearings on gun industry	74.2	70.6	77.5	73.7	.174
Home less safe with handgun	54.8	45.9	36.9	40.9	.006
Sources: NGPS-96, NGPS 97-98, NGPS-98, NGPS-99, GSS 94-98					

Question Wordings: See Tables 1-4,6

Table 16
Political Differences in Attitudes Toward and Use of Guns

	Party Identity				Political Ideology			
	Rep.	Ind.	Dem.	Prob.	Lib.	Mod.	Con.	Prob.
A. Support for Gun-Control Measures								
Police permit before purchase	75.4	83.9	85.6	.000	87.2	81.2	78.0	.000
Mandatory background check and 5-day waiting period	82.0	79.1	81.6	.207	83.8	83.4	77.2	.275
Mandatory registration of handguns	77.6	77.5	83.9	.001	82.6	85.3	75.0	.002
Checks on private sales of guns	79.9	76.5	80.5	.138	80.0	82.0	75.6	.007
Restrictions on sale of ammunition	67.1	68.5	82.9	.000	78.8	72.6	71.8	.457
Keep guns from criminals, even if harder for law-abiding	62.8	68.7	76.7	.014	76.3	70.6	66.8	.008
Ban all high-capacity ammunition magazines	63.7	66.1	70.0	.573	74.7	70.3	60.5	.000
Handgun owners must at least be licensed and trained	55.8	63.4	76.2	.000	73.9	65.5	62.7	.000
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	57.1	57.3	68.4	.000	69.4	63.7	55.7	.002
Concealed carrying only for those with special needs	47.9	51.9	67.0	.000	59.6	59.6	51.5	.123
General concealed carrying laws make it less safe	41.4	45.1	47.8	.073	53.3	47.3	39.8	.006
Ban possession of handguns, except police/authorized (98)	----	----	----	----	50.0	37.7	36.6	.018
Total ban on handguns	8.2	12.3	16.7	.000	18.3	9.9	12.5	.013
B. Support for Gun-Safety Measures and Beliefs								
Require federal handgun safety standards	91.7	94.0	95.2	.307	95.6	95.4	91.4	.047
Gun buyers must take gun-safety course	81.5	85.5	86.4	.297	81.8	86.6	84.4	.677
Federal handgun safety standards even if more expensive	88.1	85.9	85.6	.046	88.5	88.5	83.4	.094

Table 16 (Continued)								
	Party Identity				Political Ideology			
	Rep.	Ind.	Dem.	Prob.	Lib.	Mod.	Con.	Prob.
Require that all new handguns be childproof	80.3	86.3	89.6	.000	87.2	89.3	82.4	.008
Make owners liable for injuries if gun not stored to prevent misuse by children	72.9	75.6	79.1	.001	84.3	81.4	68.5	.000
Guns must be stored in locked box or cabinet	64.2	75.0	81.0	.000	80.7	76.5	69.1	.007
Guns must be stored unloaded	66.0	72.7	81.6	.000	75.7	78.7	69.4	.045
Guns must be stored with trigger lock	66.7	70.2	80.0	.001	81.0	73.5	68.7	.030
Current gun owners must take gun-safety course	59.9	68.1	74.8	.002	71.0	67.5	68.1	.951
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	61.9	62.9	73.7	.013	76.6	66.4	61.5	.000
Requiring that all new handguns be personalized	55.3	65.7	68.2	.001	71.9	62.0	59.8	.000
Current gun owners who won't take gun-safety course be required to turn in their guns	40.3	48.3	57.9	.000	55.5	45.0	50.2	.037
C. Prohibiting Gun Purchases to Criminals Convicted of...								
Domestic violence	89.6	89.1	93.6	.017	92.2	89.7	89.9	.609
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	82.2	79.3	87.1	.108	87.0	83.3	80.2	.288
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	82.7	76.3	87.7	.000	81.9	82.1	81.5	.569
Driving under the influence of alcohol	61.4	65.9	72.2	.001	65.3	69.5	64.8	.343
Wait and \$25 fee to pay for background checks	82.8	77.0	78.2	.236	84.9	79.2	76.2	.048

Table 16 (Continued)								
	Party Identity				Political Ideology			
	Rep.	Ind.	Dem.	Prob.	Lib.	Mod.	Con.	Prob.
D. Illegal Gun Use								
Double sentence if gun used during crime	80.9	74.6	81.4	.302	78.5	80.0	76.9	.142
Treat illegal gun possession as a serious crime	82.6	81.5	81.3	.925	79.3	81.3	83.3	.364
E. Miscellaneous Beliefs and Issues								
Business should prohibit carrying of concealed weapons on premises	66.7	74.7	83.8	.000	79.8	78.6	72.2	.024
Manufacturers liable for gun misuse	26.2	41.0	49.9	.000	53.3	37.5	35.6	.000
Congress should hold hearings on gun industry	64.1	73.7	83.7	.000	82.0	79.5	67.8	.000
Home less safe with handgun	38.3	40.6	50.1	.016	54.4	39.7	41.1	.000
Sources: NGPS-96, NGPS 97-98, NGPS-98, NGPS-99, GSS 94-98								

Question Wordings: See Tables 1-4,6

Table 17
Partisan Preferences on Gun-Control Issue
Which Party's Position Better/Preferred

Organization	Date	Dem.	Rep.	Both/Equal	Neither	DK	
ABC/WP	5/99	39%	31%	3%	22%	5%	(761)
Gallup	5/99	42	39	---	8	11	(1050)
PSRA	6/99	42	34	4	8	12	(1153)
Fox	6/99	40	32	8	---	20	(908)
Gallup	6/99	42	39	---	8	11	(1016)
NBC/WSJ	6/99	29	24	23	16	8	(2011)
CBS	8/99	33	29	3	12	23	(736)
PSRA	8/99	34	26	8	---	32	(753)
ABC/WP	8-9/99	46	40	3	7	4	(1526)

Question Wordings:

ABC/WP: [And] which political party, the Democrats or the Republicans, do you trust to do a better job handling the issue of gun control?

PSRA: In general, which political party do you agree with more on the issue of gun control...the Republican Party or the Democratic Party?

CBS: Regardless of how you usually vote, do you think the Republican party or the Democratic party would so a better job dealing with gun control?

NBC/WSJ: When it comes to dealing with gun control which party do you think would do a better job—the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, both the same, or neither?

Gallup: Which party do you think can do a better job of reflecting your views about gun control—the Republican Party or the Democratic Party?

Fox: Which political party—the Republicans or the Democrats—do you think would do the best job on each of the following issues? Gun control (Registered voters only)

Table 18
Impact on Safety of Guns in the Home

Statement	% 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 chances 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 chances 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?

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