

## **Gun Control is Popular, But Not a Top Priority**

From a ban on assault weapons to mandatory handgun registration, large majorities of Americans support a wide range of gun control measures. But it's relatively low on their priority list, and precious few choose a candidate based on the issue.

One key reason: Broad doubt it'll work. An ABC News/Washington Post poll finds that nearly half the public thinks gun control wouldn't do anything to at all reduce violent crime in this country, and just three in 10 think it would reduce violence substantially.

The result of this ambivalence is relatively low public pressure for gun control legislation, despite the shooting incidents that began at Columbine High School last spring and continued through the summer from Atlanta to Los Angeles.

In a list of priority items for Congress to handle, 55 percent call it very important to enact tougher gun control, compared to around 80 percent for laws protecting patients' rights, Social Security and Medicare. And gun control scores comparatively low in a list of voting issues for the 2000 presidential election, ranking 12<sup>th</sup> of 15 items.

This even though the number of Americans who say they "strongly" support gun control has risen from 28 percent 10 years ago to 52 percent now.

**VIOLENCE** – Interest in gun control is highest, naturally, among people who think it would reduce violence. Among those who think it would reduce crime "a lot," 87 percent call new gun control legislation very important. Among those who think it would reduce violence "somewhat," 75 call it very important.

But among those who don't think it would reduce violent crime at all – 48 percent of Americans – just 27 percent call it very important for Congress to act.

	Gun control will reduce crime:		
	A lot	Somewhat	Not at all
Important for Congress to act	87%	75	27

**OUTCRY** – Moreover, the lack of legislation after the Columbine shootings has produced little outcry. While there is general dissatisfaction with the way Congress has handled the issue, few show much emotion: Only 18 percent are angry with Congress for its work on gun control, and a third of them are gun control opponents.

Feelings about Congress' handling of gun control:

Pleased 4%	Satisfied 33	Dissatisfied 41	Angry 18
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There's also little personal activism in support of gun control, a hallmark of a pressure issue. Around 10 percent of gun control supporters have ever contacted a public official about the issue, given money to an organization concerned with it, or voted for or against a candidate because of their stand on gun control.

Gun control opponents, while in the minority, do a better job of making their voices heard: They're almost twice as likely as proponents to have given money or voted primarily based on the gun issue, and slightly more apt to have contacted a public official.

	Support gun control	Oppose gun control
Contacted a public official about gun control	9%	13
Gave money to an organization concerned with the gun control issue	11	19
Voted for/against a candidate because of their position on gun control	11	19

Possibly because of the longstanding political gridlock on this issue, the Democrats in Washington have failed to turn it to their advantage. Although Democrats have been the main proponents of gun control, they lead the Republicans in public trust to handle the issue only by six points, 46 percent to 40 percent. For the Democrats to turn the issue to their advantage, this poll suggests, they need to convince more people it would reduce violent crime.

SUPPORT – Sixty-three percent of Americans favor stricter gun control laws in general, right about where the public's been on this issue the past ten years. "Strong" support, as noted above, is up. And support goes much higher for a range of specific proposals, such as mandatory gun locks and background checks at gun shows.

But the majority goes only so far: The public splits evenly on a ban on carrying concealed weapons (49 percent support the idea, 48 percent oppose it). And only a third support an outright ban on the sale of handguns.

	Support
Background checks at gun shows	90%
Mandatory trigger locks	79
Ban on assault weapons	77
Registration of handgun owners	75
Ban on mail order/internet gun sales	66
Ban on carrying a concealed weapon	49
Ban on handgun sales except to police	32

GROUPS – Support for gun control differs by population group, running higher among women, Democrats and people who don't own guns. But even among men, Republicans

and gun owners, majorities favor all but the two most restrictive proposals – a ban on concealed weapons and a ban on handgun sales.

	% Support among					
	Gun owner?					
	Yes	No	Men	Women	Dem	Rep
Stricter gun control	42%	73	51	73	73	49
Background checks at gun shows	81	93	84	95	95	90
Mandatory trigger locks	57	88	67	89	86	76
Ban on assault weapons	63	84	67	86	84	72
Ban on mail order and internet gun sales	56	71	62	69	67	62
Handgun owners to register with govt	59	83	66	84	84	65
Ban on carrying a concealed weapon	34	58	44	55	56	39
Ban on handgun sales except to police	17	40	25	39	39	27

NRA – About half the public thinks the NRA has too much influence on this issue, compared with only 17 percent saying it has too little influence, unchanged from 1993. Those who don't own guns are much more likely to say the NRA has too much influence, whereas a plurality of gun owners think the NRA's influence is about right.

Amount of NRA influence:	Gun owner?	
	Yes	No
Too much	31%	55
Too little	23	14
Right amount	43	25

GUN OWNERS – There's a gun (or guns) in 44 percent of the country's households. Shotguns are the most popular type of firearm (in 63 percent of gun households) followed by rifles (59 percent) and handguns (53 percent).

Just under a third (29 percent) of individuals own a gun. Gun ownership is much higher among men (49 percent) than women (12 percent). The overriding reason for owning a gun is hunting (49 percent), with protection a distant second (26 percent). Men are more likely to own a gun for hunting, and women for protection.

Main reason for owning a gun:	
Hunting	49%
Protection	26
Target/Sport	8
Collect/Hobby	4
Constitutional right	4
Other	10

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Aug. 30-Sept. 2, 1999, among a random national sample of 1,526 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Field work by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Daniel Merkle.



	NET	Strngly	Smewht	NET	Strngly	Smewht	opin.
9/2/99	77	68	9	22	14	8	1
5/16/99	79	67	12	19	12	7	2
6/14/94	80	NA	NA	18	NA	NA	2

d. A nationwide ban on gun sales by mail order and over the internet

	-----Support-----			-----Oppose-----			No
	NET	Strngly	Smewht	NET	Strngly	Smewht	opin.
9/2/99	66	57	8	33	26	7	1
5/16/99	70	60	10	28	19	9	2

34. Do you think stricter gun control laws would reduce the amount of violent crime in this country, or not? (If yes: Would it reduce it a lot or just somewhat?)

	-----Reduce-----			Not reduce	No opin.
	NET	A lot	Somewhat		
9/2/99	50	30	21	48	1

35. All in all, how do you feel about the way Congress has handled the issue of gun control - would you say you're pleased about it, satisfied but not pleased, dissatisfied but not angry, or angry about it?

	-----Pleased/Satisfied-----			-----Dissatisfied/Angry-----			No
	NET	Pleased	Satisfied	NET	Dissatisfied	Angry	opin.
9/2/99	37	4	33	60	41	18	4

36. Do you think the National Rifle Association has too much influence, too little influence, or the right amount of influence over gun control laws in this country?

	Too much	Too little	Right amount	No opinion
9/2/99	47	17	31	5
12/5/93*	45	15	27	13

\*PSRA

37. Do you or does anyone in your house own a gun, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
9/2/99	44	56	*
5/16/99	46	53	*

38. (Among those with a gun in household) What kind of gun or guns would that be - handgun, shotgun, rifle or what?

	Handgun	Shotgun	Rifle	Other	No opinion
9/2/99	53	63	59	2	2

39. (Among those with a gun in household) Do you personally own a gun or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
9/2/99	66	34	0

40. (Of those who own a gun) Why do you own a gun-what's the main reason?

	9/2/99
Protection	26
Hunting	49
Target/Sport	8
Collect/Hobby	4
Gun Dealer	0
Second Amendment/Constitutional Right	4
Other	10
No opinion	0

41. Have you ever (ITEM)?

9/2/99

	Yes	No	No opinion
a. Called, written to, or emailed a public official expressing your views on gun control	10	90	*
b. Given money to an organization concerned with the gun control issue	13	86	1
c. Voted for or against a political candidate mainly because of their position on gun control	14	85	1

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