

# UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion Attitudes towards Gun Violence and Gun Control April 21-28, 2014

N=1000 American adults  
Sampling error +/- 3.7 percentage points for all respondents

See <http://uml.edu/polls> for full questionnaire/topline results and detailed methodology disclosure.

Survey design by UMass Lowell Students: Nowell Sheinwald, Brendan Thompson, and Makayle Washington

Survey Direction and Analysis by Joshua J. Dyck, Ph.D., Co-Director of the Center for Public Opinion and Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Massachusetts Lowell

---

## HIGHLIGHTS

In April of 2014, the UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion surveyed 1,000 American Adults on their attitudes about gun violence and gun control in America. The survey was initiated by students at the University, who competed in teams in an advanced Political Science Seminar (PS 319 – Survey Research) in the Fall of 2013 to have their proposal fielded on a national survey.

The students worked in conjunction with Center for Public Opinion faculty members to revise and complete a final survey draft. The survey was then administered by YouGov and fielded in April, 2014.

The survey paints a fascinating portrait of an American public that is generally supportive of many of the components of gun control which have not advanced through the US Congress. In addition, the results show that opinions about gun violence have a clear partisan component, which a strong connection between perceived gun violence and strong support for gun control reforms.

### **Strong Support for Revision of Existing Gun Laws**

- Respondents were asked about support for 4 policy changes that have been suggested to combat gun violence: (1) a ban on assault weapons, (2) more in depth background checks than involve psychological evaluations for prospective gun buyers, (3) requiring background checks for those who purchase guns at gun shows, and (4) training and arming teachers to carry firearms in schools. Perhaps the most interesting finding in the survey is that there is at least majority support of *all of these proposals*.
  - 60% (40% Strongly/20% Somewhat) support banning the sale of assault weapons.
  - 78% (54% Strongly/24% Somewhat) support more thorough background checks, such as more in depth psychological evaluations, for anyone attempting to purchase a firearm.

- 80% (53% Strongly/27% Somewhat) support closing the so-called “gun show loophole” by requiring the same background checks used at gun retailers to be used at gun shows.
  - 52% (20% Strongly/32% Somewhat) support allowing and training teachers to carry firearms in schools to protect students against an assailant.
- Partisan differences are driving the results on assault weapons; 85% of Strong Democrats/71% of Weak/Leaning Democrats support a ban, compared to 36% of Weak/Leaning Republicans and 42% of Strong Republicans. Only 18% of those identifying as members of the Tea Party support a ban on assault weapons.
  - There is broad bi-partisan support for more thorough background checks; 92% of Strong Democrats, 83% of Weak/Leaning Democrats, 69% of Independents, 70% of Weak/Leaning Republicans and 70% of Strong Republicans support more thorough background checks. The only group in the sample that actually opposes more thorough background checks are the Tea Party, and even so, only a bare majority of 51% of Tea Party members oppose more thorough background checks compared to 49% who support background checks.
  - Similar bi-partisan support is found for closing the so-called “gun show loophole” that allows individuals to purchase firearms at gun shows without succumbing to a background check. This reform is supported by 87% of Strong Democrats, 84% of Weak/Leaning Democrats, 74% of Independents, 77% of Weak/Leaning Republicans, and 77% of Strong Republicans. It is even supported by 65% of self-identified members of the Tea Party.
  - A majority does favor the arming and training of teachers, but this issue is considerably more closely divided than the others in the survey. A majority of respondents in non-metro/rural areas (64%) and small/medium cities (54%) support the idea, while it is opposed in large cities and suburbs; 44% of those in large cities and 49% in large city suburbs support arming teachers. A majority of whites (54%) favor the policy, while African-Americans oppose this idea (37% support to 63% oppose). Democrats are strongly opposed to arming teachers (only 29% of Strong Democrats support the idea), compared to Strong Republicans (70% support), Weak/Leaning Republicans (77% support) and Tea Party members (81% support).

### **Views about Gun Violence**

- Americans are concerned about gun violence, with 47% saying they are very concerned and 37% saying they are somewhat concerned about the level gun violence and gun-related crimes in the past few years. Concern is stronger among those who live in Large Metropolitan Areas (55% very concerned) compared to those who live in Suburbs (44%), Small or Medium Metropolitan Areas (41%) or rural/non-metropolitan areas (49%). African-Americans (70%) are much more likely to say they are “very concerned” with gun violence than whites (42%), Latinos (47%) and all others (48%).
- Concern about gun violence and gun crime also appears to have a partisan character, even though we are asking about gun crimes and gun violence, not policies about what to do about it. Strong Democrats are twice as likely to say they are very concerned about gun

violence (70%) than Strong Republicans. Curiously, Weak/Leaning Republicans are the least likely to express concern. The relationship becomes even more clear when we look at the difference between the 11% of our sample who count themselves members of the Tea Party and the other 89% of respondents. Only 21% of Tea Party members are “very concerned” about gun violence, compared to 50% of the general population. Additionally, 31% of Tea Party members report being unconcerned (not very concerned or not at all concerned) about gun violence, compared to only 15% of non-Tea Party members.

- There is less variation between respondents on whether or not gun violence has become an increasing problem in our society. A large majority (69%) believe that school shootings have become a bigger problem in the past decade. Strong Democrats (76%) are more likely than Strong Republicans (66%) to state this, but the differences are less stark than in the previous question. Still, the difference between those identifying as members of the Tea Party are significantly different than the extant population; 48% of Tea Party members believe that school shootings have become more of a problem in the last decade compared to 72% of non-Tea Party members.
- Some of the differences observed in the data may be due to geographic/neighborhood differences and actual experience with gun violence. When asked about the places that people live and work, 19% said they were very concerned about gun violence in their local community, 34% said they were somewhat concerned (net=53% concerned), 34% said they were not very concerned and 13% said they were not at all concerned (net=47% not concerned). Those who live in large metropolitan areas (defined as a MSA of more than 1 million people) are considerably more likely to be concerned about gun violence in their communities (29% very concerned, 25% somewhat concerned/net=54% concerned) than those in metro suburbs (net=43% concerned) and non-metro/rural areas (net=35% concerned). African-Americans are the most likely to express concern about gun violence in their local community (47% very concerned, 31% somewhat concerned/net=78%) compared to all other groups (net for whites=50%, Latinos=54%, other=43%). Democrats are also much more likely than Republicans to report concern in their local communities; 69% of Democrats are either very concerned (33%) or somewhat concerned (36%) about local gun violence compared to 47% of Republicans who are either very concerned (11%) or somewhat concerned (36%).
- We also found that 72% of respondents also view gang violence as a major problem; the consistency of these effects across geographic areas is quite interesting. The biggest difference in perceived gang violence is a 16 point gap between strong partisans and a 17 point gap among weak/leaning partisans with Republicans consistently more likely to identify gang violence as a major problem. We would speculate that all of these answers to perceptions about gun violence are influenced by policy positions. Individuals were highly attuned in answering questions about gun violence in how their answers may affect subsequent questions about policy.

### **Gun Ownership**

- One quarter of American adults, according to results from our sample, report owning a gun or guns, which 38% report living in a home with a firearm. Political and geographic

variation in gun ownership is quite wide. Only 15% of those living in large metropolitan areas report owning a gun compared to 45% of those in non-metro/rural areas. Whites are more than twice as likely as African-Americans (31% to 14%) to report gun ownership; Republicans (Strong-38%, Weak/Leaning-44%) are more than twice as likely as Democrats (Strong-18%, Weak/Leaning-16%) to report gun ownership; and Tea Party members (47%) are more than twice as likely as non-Tea Party members (23%) to report gun ownership. Clearly, gun ownership is related to many of the underlying variables which predict perceptions of gun violence and views about gun control policies.

- The most common reason that Americans report for owning a gun is personal protection; 80% of those who own guns say that it is for personal protection, 45% say it is a hobby, 37% say it is for hunting and 6% say that their gun is work-related.