



**THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
**For The People & The Press**

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2011

Most Point to Troubled Individuals,  
Not Broader Societal Problems

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## No Shift Toward Gun Control After Tucson Shootings

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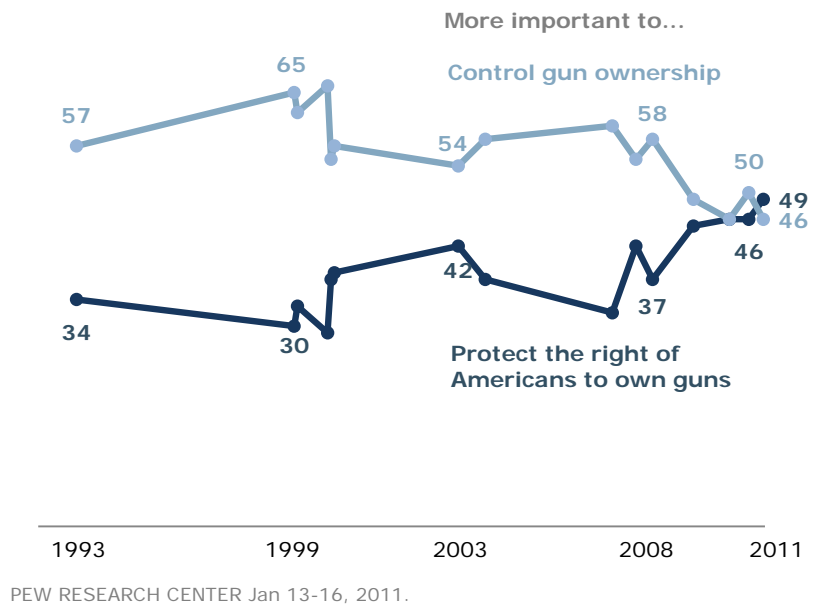
## Most Point to Troubled Individuals, Not Broader Societal Problems No Shift Toward Gun Control After Tucson Shootings

In the wake of the Tucson shootings, there is no significant change in public views on the issue of gun control and gun rights. Currently, 49% of Americans say it is more important to protect the right of Americans to own guns, while 46% say it is more important to control gun ownership. In September 2010, 50% prioritized gun control, 46% gun rights. In this regard, there is no sign that the longer trend toward an emphasis on gun owners' rights has abated.

The issue remains a deeply divisive one along party lines – by a 72% to 22% margin Republicans say protecting gun rights is more important, while by a 70% to 26% margin Democrats prioritize gun control. Independents are more divided, with 52% favoring gun rights and 44% gun control. For a comprehensive look at opinions on the gun issue, see “[Views of Gun Control – A Detailed Demographic Breakdown](#),” Jan. 13.

Perhaps one reason that attitudes remained stable was how few saw the events in Tucson as a sign of broader social problems. Most (58%) Americans say things like this are just the isolated acts of troubled individuals. Only about half as many (31%) saw the shooting in Tucson as a reflection of broader problems in American society. By comparison, Americans were more likely to see broader problems behind the Virginia Tech shootings nearly four

### Gun Views Remain Divided



### Most See Tucson Shooting as an Isolated Event

Shootings like this one...	Apr 2007 VA Tech Shooting (%)	Jan 2011 Tucson Shooting (%)
Are just the isolated acts of troubled individuals	47	58
Reflect broader problems in American society	46	31
Don't know	7	12
	100	100

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years ago – at that time, 46% thought the tragic events reflected broader societal problems.

Those who see broader social problems behind the shooting offer a variety of explanations. When asked to describe, in their own words, what the tragedy reflects in society, 27% point to problems in the social climate, such as the breakdown of society, the way children are raised, a lack of civility, respect, discipline and a general move away from religion, God and morality. But nearly as many (21%) believe that the shooting reflected problems in the political and media environment, such as political divisiveness and the impression that so many people are deeply unhappy with government these days.

Another 14% of those who see the Tucson shooting as reflective of broader social problems specifically mentioned problems in the mental health system, and 13% referred to weak gun laws that make it too easy for people to get guns. Slightly fewer (9%) described economic stress and unemployment as factors behind the shooting.

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## What Are the “Broader Problems” Reflected by the Tucson Shooting?

(Among the 31% Who Say the Shooting Reflects Broader Societal Problems)

%

### 27 Social Climate (Net)

- 8 Breakdown of society
- 6 Poor child rearing / Bad kids
- 4 Lack of civility/respect
- 3 Feelings of frustration/hopelessness
- 2 Lack of religion / God pushed out
- 2 Lack of discipline/self-control
- 2 Lack of morals
- 1 Stupidity

### 21 Political & Media Climate (Net)

- 11 Partisan hatred / Political divisiveness
- 7 People are upset with government
- 2 Polarizing rhetoric
- 2 Media coverage of politics / Talk shows
- 2 Extremists within Republican Party

### 14 Poor mental health services / problems

### 13 Gun laws / Too easy to get guns

### 9 Economic conditions / Unemployment

### 6 Violence (general)

### 1 Lack of security / Need security

### 17 Other

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HOW TO READ THIS TABLE: Figures are based on those who say the shooting reflects broader problems in American society (N=307). For example, while 27% of these respondents mentioned aspects of the social climate, that represents just 8% of the public at large.

Figures add to more than 100% due to multiple responses.

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## About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted January 13-16, 2011 among a national sample of 1,000 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (670 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 330 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 134 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see: <http://people-press.org/methodology/detailed>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2010 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), based on extrapolations from the 2010 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Sample Size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1000	4.0 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

## About the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER NEWS INTEREST INDEX  
JANUARY 13-16, 2010 OMNIBUS  
FINAL TOPLINE  
N=1,000**

**PEW.1-PEW.2 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

**ASK ALL:**

Thinking about the shooting in Tucson, Arizona last week...

PEW.3 Do you think this shooting reflects broader problems in American society, or are things like this just the isolated acts of troubled individuals?

**TREND FOR COMPARISON:**

Jan 13-16 <u>2011</u>		April 18-22 <u>2007<sup>1</sup></u>
31	Broader problems	46
58	Isolated acts	47
12	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	7

**IF PEW.3= 1 ("BROADER PROBLEMS"), ASK [N=307]:**

PEW.4 Just in your own view, what broader problems does this shooting reflect? [OPEN END; ACCEPT UP TO THREE RESPONSES; DO NOT PROBE FOR ADDITIONAL]

Jan 13-16

2011

**27 SOCIAL CLIMATE (NET)**

- 8 Breakdown of society (general)
- 6 Poor child rearing/Bad family/Bad kids/Bad education system
- 4 Lack of civility/respect
- 3 Feelings of frustration/discontent/hopelessness (general)
- 2 Lack of religion/God pushed out of society
- 2 Lack of discipline/self control
- 2 Anger
- 2 Lack of morals
- 1 Stupidity

**21 POLITICAL/MEDIA CLIMATE (NET)**

- 11 Partisan hatred/Political divisiveness
- 7 Dissatisfaction/upset with government
- 2 Polarizing rhetoric
- 2 Media coverage of politics/Talk show hosts
- 2 Extremists within the Republican Party/The Republican Party is to blame

- 14 Lack of mental health services/Mental health problems
- 13 Lack of gun control/access to guns
- 9 Dissatisfaction/upset with economy/unemployment
- 6 Violence (general)
- 1 Security issues
- 17 Other
- 8 Don't know/Refused

*Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple responses.*

<sup>1</sup> Question was asked after the shooting at Virginia Tech and asked about "this shooting and others like it."

**TREND FOR COMPARISON: Virginia Tech Shooting**

April 18-22

2007**37 MORALITY/SOCIAL VALUES (NET)**

- 11 Moral breakdown / People don't know right from wrong
- 9 Violence in society/Movies/TV/Music/Video games
- 9 Family breakdown / Children neglected
- 5 Lack of community / No one cares or pays attention
- 5 Youth out of control / Selfish / No discipline
- 3 Lack of religion

**23 SOCIAL/GOVERNMENT SYSTEM FAILURES (NET)**

- 13 Mental health system not helping those in need
- 5 Legal system / Laws don't allow these people to be locked up
- 3 Not enough security
- 3 School system failing

14 Gun laws/Too easy to get guns

**12 SOCIAL/PERSONAL PRESSURES (NET)**

- 4 Social alienation / Isolation / Despair
- 3 Young people can't cope / High-pressure/fast-paced society breeds insecurity
- 2 Rich-poor divide breeds anger
- 2 Racial divisions / Minorities face pressures
- 1 Bullying
- 5 Copycat violence / Media coverage glorifies/sensationalizes
- 4 Crazy people in the world / He was crazy
- 2 Immigration
- 7 Other
- 11 Don't know/Refused

**[N=687]****PEW.5-PEW.8 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED****NO PEW.9 OR PEW.10****PEW.11 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE****ASK ALL:**

PEW.12 What do you think is more important—to protect the right of Americans to own guns, OR to control gun ownership?

	<u>Protect right to own guns</u>	<u>Control gun ownership</u>	<b>(VOL.) DK/Ref</b>
January 13-16, 2011	49	46	6
Aug 25-Sep 6, 2010	46	50	4
Mar 10-14, 2010	46	46	7
Mar 31-Apr 1, 2009	45	49	6
Apr, 2008	37	58	5
Nov, 2007	42	55	3
Apr, 2007	32	60	8
Feb, 2004	37	58	5
Jun, 2003	42	54	4
May, 2000	38	57	5
Apr, 2000	37	55	8
Mar, 2000	29	66	5
Jun, 1999	33	62	5
May, 1999	30	65	5
Dec, 1993	34	57	9