



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press

NEWS Release
1615 L Street, N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel (202) 419-4350
Fax (202) 419-4399

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PUBLIC CONTINUES TO OPPOSE BANNING HANDGUN SALES

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Andrew Kohut, Director
Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock, Associate Directors
Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research
Pew Research Center for the People & the Press
202/419-4350
<http://www.people-press.org>

PUBLIC CONTINUES TO OPPOSE BANNING HANDGUN SALES

As the Supreme Court considers the constitutionality of Washington, D.C.'s ban on handguns, a majority of Americans (59%) say they would oppose a law that banned the sale of handguns. Opposition to a prohibition of handgun sales is up slightly, from 55% a year ago shortly after the Virginia Tech shootings, but it represents a more substantial increase from the 1990s, when roughly half of Americans opposed a ban on handguns.

The latest survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted April 23-27 among 1,502 Americans, finds that public attitudes about gun control also have shown little change in recent years.

Most Oppose Ban on Handgun Sales

<i>Law banning handgun sales:</i>	Dec	May	Mar	April	April
	1993	1999	2000	2007	2008
Favor	45	44	47	37	36
Oppose	51	50	47	55	59
Don't know	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>5</u>
	100	100	100	100	100

Despite the public's opposition to a ban on handgun sales, most Americans continue to say that in general it is more important to control gun ownership than to protect the rights of gun owners. Roughly six-in-ten (58%) say it is more important to control gun ownership while 37% say it is more important to protect the rights of Americans to own guns.

Public attitudes about gun control and a handgun ban are divided along political, gender and racial lines. Nearly three-quarters of Republicans (73%) oppose a ban on handgun sales, a view shared by 59% of independents and just half of Democrats. Democrats differ over a law to ban handgun sales. A majority of the party's conservatives and moderates (53%) oppose such a ban; among liberal Democrats, 43% are opposed while half favor a ban on handgun sales.

Opposition to a prohibition on handgun sales is greater among men than women (65% vs. 53%), and among whites than blacks (61% vs. 49%). In addition, though majorities of urban, suburban and rural residents oppose a handgun ban,

Democrats Differ Over Ban on Handgun Sales

	<i>Law banning handgun sales</i>			
	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Favor</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>N</u>
	%	%	%	
Total	59	36	5=100	1,502
Republican	73	23	4=100	412
Conservative	74	22	4=100	301
Mod/Lib	68	24	8=100	102
Democrat	50	44	6=100	521
Cons/Mod	53	43	4=100	316
Liberal Dem	43	50	7=100	184
Independent	59	37	4=100	462
Men	65	30	5=100	723
Women	53	41	6=100	779
White	61	34	5=100	1,249
Black	49	44	7=100	134
Northeast	52	43	5=100	285
Midwest	55	40	5=100	366
South	64	30	6=100	518
West	62	34	4=100	333
Urban	56	37	7=100	447
Suburban	59	37	4=100	752
Rural	65	28	7=100	303

Figures read horizontally.

more rural residents than urban residents oppose a ban. Southerners are more likely to oppose a handgun ban than are Northeasterners or Midwesterners.

Reflecting the partisan differences in views of a ban on handgun sales, 63% of those who favor a ban on handgun sales support Barack Obama in a general election matchup against John McCain; a comparable proportion back Hillary Clinton against McCain (62%). Most Americans who oppose such a ban support McCain in matchups with both Democrats (54% against Obama and 55% against Clinton). In the Democratic primary, supporters of a handgun ban are evenly divided between Obama and Clinton; 47% say they prefer Obama while 43% favor Clinton.

	<i>Handgun ban</i>	
	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Favor</u>
<i>General election*:</i>	%	%
Prefer McCain	54	30
Prefer Obama	42	63
Other/DK	<u>7</u>	<u>7</u>
	100	100
Prefer McCain	55	31
Prefer Clinton	40	62
Other/DK	<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>
	100	100
<i>Dem primary**:</i>		
Prefer Obama	47	47
Prefer Clinton	46	43
Other/DK	<u>7</u>	<u>10</u>
	100	100

* Based on 1,323 registered voters.
 ** Based on 651 Democratic- and Democratic-leaning registered voters.

Most Favor Controlling Gun Ownership

Public opinion about gun control has been stable in recent years. Notably, last year's shootings at Virginia Tech University had little impact on these attitudes. In April 2007, following the shootings, 60% said it was more important to control gun ownership than to protect gun owners' rights, which had not changed significantly from 2004 (58%).

Support for controlling gun ownership rose somewhat following the 1999 massacre at Colorado's Columbine High School; in May 1999, about two-thirds of the public said controlling gun ownership was more important than upholding gun owners' rights (65% in May 1999). But the proportion expressing this view fell sharply the following spring from 66% in March 2000 to 55% in April. Since then, the proportion saying that controlling gun ownership takes precedence over gun owners' rights has fluctuated modestly.

	Dec 1993	May 1999	Mar 2000	April 2000	June 2003	Feb 2004	April 2007	April 2008
<i>More important to...</i>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Protect gun owners' rights	34	30	29	37	42	37	32	37
Control gun ownership	57	65	66	55	54	58	60	58
Don't know	<u>9</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>5</u>
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

There are greater partisan and demographic differences in opinions about gun control than in views of a law banning handgun sales. More than twice as many Republicans as Democrats say it is more important to protect the rights of gun owners than to control gun ownership (59% vs. 23%).

While men divide fairly evenly in views of whether gun rights or gun control is more important, women by greater than two-to-one (64% to 30%) say it is more important to control gun ownership. In addition, fully three-quarters of African Americans (75%) say controlling gun ownership is more important compared with just 54% of whites.

	<i>More important to...</i>		
	<u>Protect gun owners' rights</u>	<u>Control gun ownership</u>	<u>DK</u>
Total	37	58	5=100
Republican	59	38	3=100
Conservative	61	37	2=100
Mod/Lib	53	42	5=100
Democrat	23	73	4=100
Cons/Mod	25	71	4=100
Liberal	16	81	3=100
Independent	39	56	5=100
Men	46	51	3=100
Women	30	64	6=100
White	41	54	5=100
Black	21	75	4=100

Figures read horizontally.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Abt SRBI, Inc. among a nationwide sample of 1,502 adults, 18 years of age or older, from April 23-27, 2008. The error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence based on the full sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points. 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 CENTER

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 eight 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:

Andrew Kohut, Director
Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research
Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock, Associate Directors
Kim Parker, Senior Researcher
Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Robert Suls, Shawn Neidorf, Leah Christian and Jocelyn Kiley,
Research Associates
Kathleen Holzwart, Research Analyst
James Albrittain and Alec Tyson, Research Assistants

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
APRIL 2008 POLITICAL SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
April 23-27, 2008
N=1502

QUESTIONS 1-3 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

ASK ALL REGISTERED VOTERS (REGICERT=1):

ROTATE Q.4-Q.4A/Q.5-Q.5A BLOCKS

Q.4 Now, suppose the 2008 presidential election were being held TODAY. If you had to choose between [READ AND ROTATE]—who would you vote for?

IF OTHER OR DK (Q.4 =3,9), ASK:

Q.4a As of TODAY, do you LEAN more to [READ, ROTATE IN SAME ORDER AS Q.4]?

BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS [N=1323]:

		Mar	Late
		<u>2008</u>	<u>2008</u>
45	McCain	44	45
49	Clinton	49	50
<u>6</u>	Other/Don't know (VOL.)	<u>7</u>	<u>5</u>
100		100	100

ASK ALL REGISTERED VOTERS (REGICERT=1):

ROTATE Q.4-Q.4A/Q.5-Q.5A BLOCKS

Q.5 Now, suppose the 2008 presidential election were being held TODAY. If you had to choose between [READ AND ROTATE]—who would you vote for?

IF OTHER OR DK (Q.5 =3,9), ASK:

Q.5a As of TODAY, do you LEAN more to [READ, ROTATE IN SAME ORDER AS Q.5]?

BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS [N=1323]:

		Mar	Late
		<u>2008</u>	<u>2008</u>
44	McCain	43	43
50	Obama	49	50
<u>6</u>	Other/Don't know (VOL.)	<u>8</u>	<u>7</u>
100		100	100

ASK OF DEMOCRATS AND DEMOCRATIC LEANING RVs [(PARTY=2 OR PARTYLN=2) AND REGICERT=1] ONLY:

Thinking about the Democratic nomination...

Q.6 Which Democratic candidate would be your first choice for president? **(READ AND ROTATE)** [IF “Don’t know” **PROBE ONCE WITH:** “Just as of today, would you say you LEAN toward...(READ). **IF STILL DK, ENTER.]**

BASED ON DEMOCRATS AND DEMOCRATIC-LEANING REGISTERED VOTERS [N=651]:

		Late		Early		WITHOUT GORE							WITH GORE		
		Mar 2008	Feb 2008	Feb 2008	Jan 2008	Dec 2007	Nov 2007	Oct 2007	Sept 2007	July 2007^	Apr 2007^	Mar 2007^	July 2007	April 2007	Mar 2007
47	Barack Obama	49	49	38	31	26	23	24	25	24	27	28	21	24	26
45	Hillary Clinton	39	40	46	46	46	45	45	42	44	39	39	40	34	35
n/a	John Edwards	n/a	n/a	n/a	13	14	12	12	14	13	21	19	18	16	*
n/a	Dennis Kucinich	n/a	n/a	n/a	4	3	1	4	2	3	1	*	2	1	*
n/a	Bill Richardson	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	3	2	3	3	2	2	2	1	1
n/a	Joe Biden	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	3	2	2	3	1	2	2	1	1
n/a	Chris Dodd	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	*	1	1	1	1	*	*	1	*	*
n/a	Mike Gravel	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
n/a	Al Gore^	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	--	--	--	12	14	12
*	Other (VOL.)	0	0	1	*	*	2	*	1	1	*	*	1	*	0
2	None of them (VOL.)	1	2	1	1	2	1	3	2	3	5	4	2	5	3
6	Don't know (VOL.)	9	8	12	4	3	9	7	8	6	3	5	6	2	5
*	Refused (VOL.)	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>*</u>	<u>*</u>	<u>*</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>*</u>	<u>1</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

^March-July trends recalculated by substituting in Al Gore supporters' second choice.

**QUESTIONS 7-20 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED
QUESTION 21 RELEASED SEPARATELY
QUESTIONS 22-23, 25 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED
NO QUESTIONS 24, 26**

On another subject...

ASK ALL:

Q.27 Would you favor or oppose a law that banned the sale of handguns?

		April 2007	March 2000	Sept 1999	May 1999	Dec 1993
36	Favor	37	47	46	44	45
59	Oppose	55	47	50	50	51
<u>5</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100

ASK ALL:

Q.28 What do you think is more important – to protect the right of Americans to own guns, OR to control gun ownership?

	<u>Nov</u> <u>2007</u>	<u>April</u> <u>2007</u>	<u>Feb</u> <u>2004</u>	<u>June</u> <u>2003</u>	<u>May</u> <u>2000</u>	<u>April</u> <u>2000</u>	<u>March</u> <u>2000</u>	<u>June</u> <u>1999</u>	<u>May</u> <u>1999</u>	<u>Dec</u> <u>1993</u>
Protect rights of Americans										
37 to own guns	42	32	37	42	38	37	29	33	30	34
58 Control gun ownership	55	60	58	54	57	55	66	62	65	57
<u>5</u> Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>3</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>9</u>
100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

QUESTIONS 29-47 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED