



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press

NEWS Release

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Since 2008, Increased Support for Gun Rights

PUBLIC DIVIDED OVER STATE, LOCAL LAWS BANNING HANDGUNS

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Since 2008, Increased Support for Gun Rights

PUBLIC DIVIDED OVER STATE, LOCAL LAWS BANNING HANDGUNS

The public is divided over whether state and local governments should be able to pass laws banning the sale and possession of handguns. The Supreme Court is expected to rule in the next few months on the constitutionality of a 28-year-old Chicago law prohibiting handgun ownership in that city.

Half of the public (50%) says that state and local governments should not be able to pass laws barring the sale or possession of handguns in their jurisdictions, while 45% say they should be able to pass such laws.

Public Divided Over Local Gun Bans – And Broader Issue of Gun Control

<i>Should state/local gov'ts be able to pass laws banning handguns?</i>				March <u>2010</u> %
Should				45
Should not				50
Don't know				<u>5</u> 100
	Apr <u>2008</u>	Apr <u>2009</u>	Mar <u>2010</u>	
<i>More important to...</i>				
Protect gun owners' rights	37	45	46	
Control gun ownership	58	49	46	
Don't know	<u>5</u> 100	<u>6</u> 100	<u>7</u> 100	

Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Previous Pew Research surveys have found broad opposition to a law banning the sale of handguns. In April 2008, 59% said they opposed a law banning handguns while 36% favored such a law. There was less opposition to a law banning handgun sales in 2000 and the late 1990s. In March 2000, 47% opposed a law banning handgun sales while the same percentage favored it.

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted March 10-14 among 1,500 adults, finds the public is evenly split over whether it is more important to protect the rights of gun owners (46%) or to control gun ownership (46%). That is largely unchanged from April 2009 (49% control gun ownership vs. 45% protect gun rights). But from 1993 to 2008, majorities had consistently said it was more important to control gun ownership than to protect the right to own guns.

The divisions in public opinion regarding the question before the Supreme Court – whether states should be allowed to pass laws banning handguns – is similar to differences in views over gun control. Most Republicans (62%) and independents (57%) believe that states and localities should not be able to pass laws banning the sale and possession of handguns. A majority of Democrats (60%) say that state and local government should be allowed to pass such laws.

There also are sizeable gender and racial differences in these attitudes. A majority of men (57%) say localities should not be allowed to pass laws banning handguns while most women (51%) say such laws should be permitted. And while 57% of whites say state and local governments should not be allowed to pass laws prohibiting handguns, majorities of African Americans (64%) and Hispanics (61%) say they should be allowed to pass these laws.

Should States and Localities Be Able to Pass Laws Banning Handguns?

	Should %	Should not %	DK %
Total	45	50	5=100
Men	38	57	4=100
Women	51	43	6=100
White, non-Hisp	38	57	5=100
Black, non-Hisp	64	30	7=100
Hispanic	61	39	1=100
White men	31	65	4=100
White women	46	49	6=100
College grad+	53	43	4=100
Some college	45	49	6=100
HS grad	37	59	4=100
Less than HS	48	43	9=100
Republican	32	62	6=100
Democrat	60	35	5=100
Independent	40	57	3=100
East	49	45	6=100
Midwest	46	49	5=100
South	42	52	6=100
West	47	50	3=100

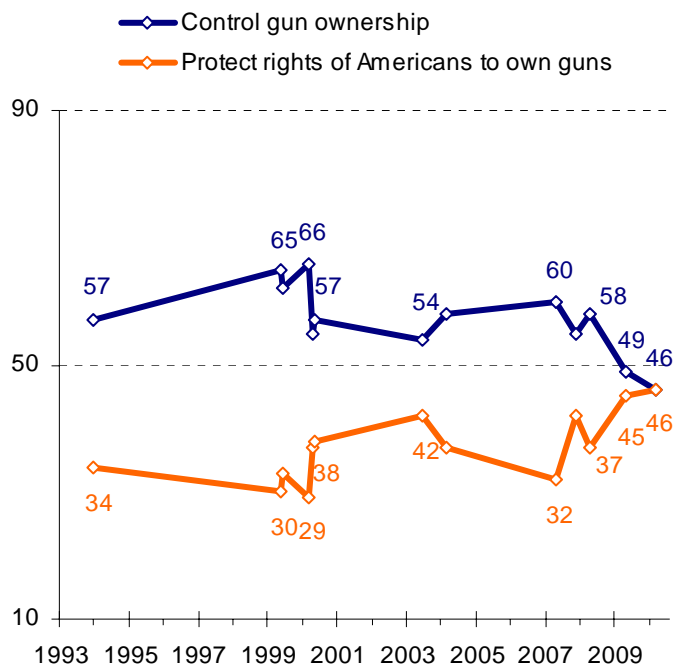
Q44. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Shifting Views on Gun Control

In May 1999, shortly after the shootings at Columbine High School, more than twice as many Americans said it was more important to control gun ownership (65%) than to protect the rights of Americans to own guns (30%). Support for gun control slipped to the mid-50% range in 2000 and remained at about that level through 2008.

Since April 2008, the number saying it is more important to control gun ownership has fallen by 12 points – from 58% to 46%. Over this period, there has been a nine-point increase (from 37% to

Increasing Support for Gun Rights



Q16.

46%) in the proportion saying it is more important to protect gun rights.

Between 2008 and 2009, support for the right to own guns increased substantially among men – particularly white men – high school graduates, independents, and people living in the Midwest and South.

There has been little change in the views of most of these groups over the past year. However, a majority of independents (53%) now say it is more important to protect gun rights, while 41% say it is more important to control gun ownership. A year ago, opinion among independents was more evenly divided (48% protect gun rights vs. 45% control gun ownership). Two years ago, a majority (56%) of independents said it was more important to control gun ownership.

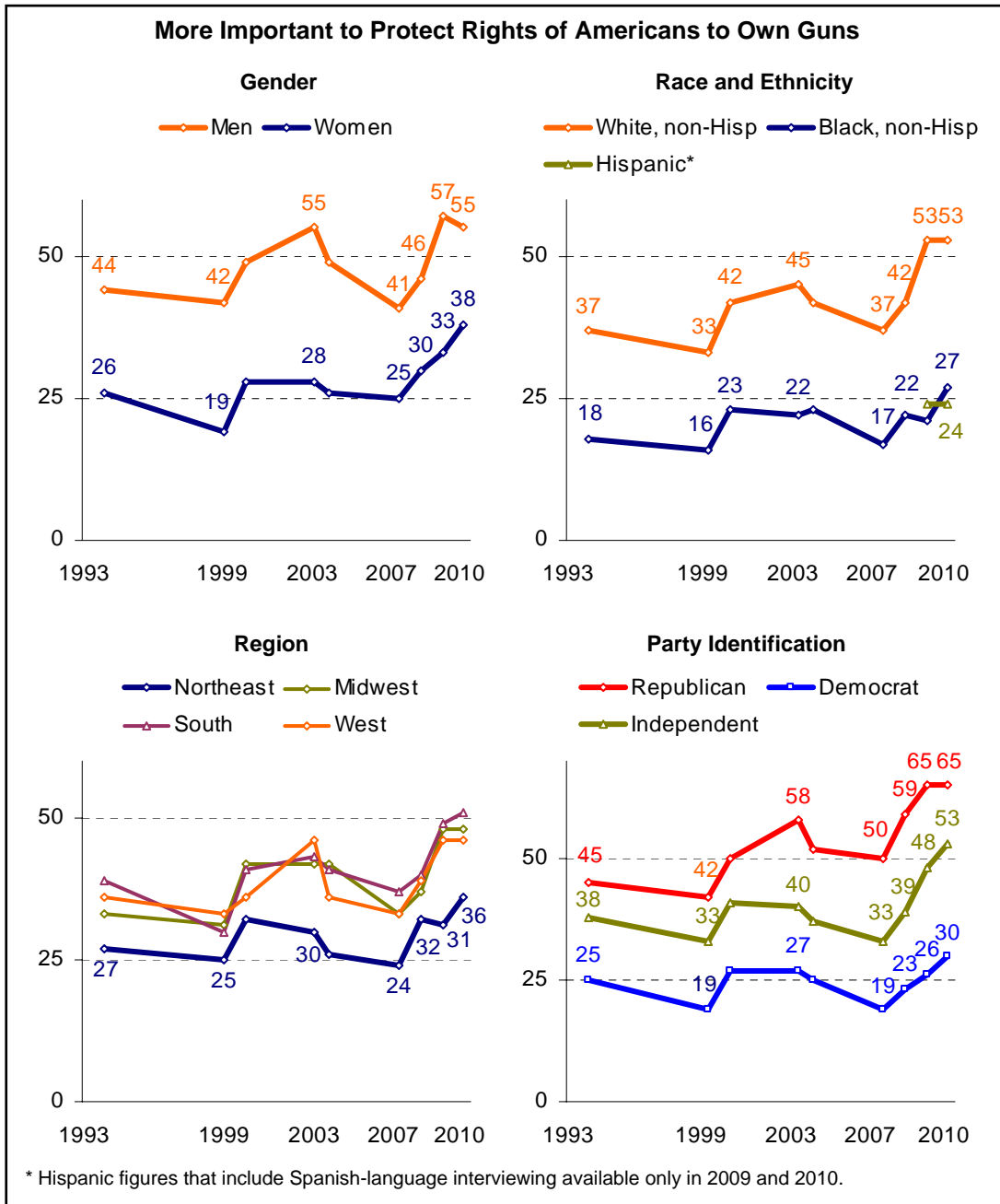
There has been a similar shift among high school graduates: by 53% to 41%, high school graduates now say it is more important to protect gun rights; opinion was divided a year ago and in 2008 a majority (56%) gave more priority to controlling gun ownership.

	<i>April 2008</i>		<i>April 2009</i>		<i>March 2010</i>	
	Protect	Control	Protect	Control	Protect	Control
	gun	gun	gun	gun	gun	gun
	rights	ownership	rights	ownership	rights	ownership
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	37	58	45	49	46	46
Men	46	51	57	38	55	39
Women	30	64	33	60	38	53
White, non-Hisp	42	53	53	41	53	39
Black, non-Hisp	22	74	21	71	27	64
Hispanic	--	--	24	72	24	67
White men	52	44	67	28	62	33
White women	33	61	39	54	45	46
College grad+	37	58	42	53	41	52
Some college	41	56	48	47	50	44
HS grad	38	56	48	45	53	41
Less than HS	33	64	32	59	32	54
Republican	59	38	65	31	65	30
Democrat	23	73	26	69	30	62
Independent	39	56	48	45	53	41
East	32	62	31	63	36	57
Midwest	37	57	48	47	48	44
South	40	57	49	45	51	42
West	39	56	46	48	46	47

Q16.

Support for gun control among white women also has fallen sharply since 2008. Two years ago, 61% of white women said it was more important to control gun ownership while 33% said it was more important to protect the right to own guns. In April 2009, white women – by 54% to 39% – said it was more important to control gun ownership. In the new survey, they are evenly divided (46% control gun ownership, 45% protect gun rights).

Long-Term Trend on Gun Control



ABOUT THE SURVEY

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of ABT/SRBI Inc. among a national sample of 1,500 adults living in the continental United States, 18 years of age or older, from March 10-14, 2010 (1,000 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 500 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 198 who had no landline telephone). Both the landline and cell phone samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see <http://people-press.org/methodology/>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race/ethnicity, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2009 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample is also 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 2009 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 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	1,500	3.0 percentage points
Republican	356	6.5 percentage points
Democrat	464	5.5 percentage points
Independent	543	5.5 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 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 FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
MARCH 2010 POLITICAL SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
March 10-14, 2010
N=1,500

QUESTIONS 1-5, 9-11, 14-15, 19-20, 22-27, 31-32, 36-39, 44-46, 49-50 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

QCEN.1-QCEN.15 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

NO QUESTIONS 6-8, 12-13, 17-18, 21, 28-30, 33-35, 40-43, 47-48

QUESTIONS 52-57 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:

On another subject ...

Q.16 What do you think is more important – to protect the right of Americans to own guns, OR to control gun ownership?

Mar 10-14 <u>2010</u>		Mar 31- Apr 21 <u>2009</u>	April <u>2008</u>	Nov <u>2007</u>	April <u>2007</u>	Feb <u>2004</u>	June <u>2003</u>	May <u>2000</u>	April <u>2000</u>	March <u>2000</u>	June <u>1999</u>	May <u>1999</u>	Dec <u>1993</u>
	Protect rights of Americans												
46	to own guns	45	37	42	32	37	42	38	37	29	33	30	34
46	Control gun ownership	49	58	55	60	58	54	57	55	66	62	65	57
7	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	6	5	3	8	5	4	5	8	5	5	5	9

ASK ALL:

Q.44 Thinking about gun laws... do you think state and local governments should or should not be able to pass laws that ban the possession or sale of handguns in their jurisdictions?

Mar 10-14 <u>2010</u>	
45	Should
50	Should not
5	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

PARTY In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?

IF ANSWERED 3, 4, 5 OR 9 IN PARTY, ASK:

PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?

	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	(VOL.) No preference	(VOL.) Other party	(VOL.) DK/Ref	<i>Lean Rep</i>	<i>Lean Dem</i>
Mar 10-14, 2010	22	33	37	6	*	3	14	13
Feb 3-9, 2010	26	31	37	3	*	3	14	17
Jan 6-10, 2010	22	33	42	2	1	2	17	16
Dec 9-13, 2009	25	32	38	2	*	2	14	15
Oct 28-Nov 8, 2009	27	35	32	3	*	2	13	13
Sep 30-Oct 4, 2009	23	34	37	3	1	3	16	14
Sep 10-15, 2009	23	34	34	4	*	5	13	17
Aug 20-27, 2009	26	32	36	3	*	3	14	16
Aug 11-17, 2009	23	33	38	3	*	3	16	15
Jul 22-26, 2009	22	34	37	5	*	2	15	14
Jun 10-14, 2009	25	34	34	3	*	3	11	16
Apr 28-May 12, 2009	23	39	29	4	*	4	9	14
Mar 31-Apr 21, 2009	22	33	39	3	*	3	13	18
Mar 9-12, 2009	24	34	35	5	*	2	12	17
Yearly Totals								
2009	23.9	34.4	35.1	3.4	.4	2.8	13.1	15.7
2008	25.3	35.8	31.7	3.8	.3	3.1	10.5	15.4
2007	25.4	32.9	33.7	4.6	.4	3.1	10.7	16.7
2006	27.6	32.8	30.3	5.0	.4	3.9	10.2	14.5
2005	29.2	32.8	30.3	4.5	.3	2.8	10.2	14.9
2004	29.7	33.4	29.8	3.9	.4	2.9	11.7	13.4
2003	29.8	31.4	31.2	4.7	.5	2.5	12.1	13.0
2002	30.3	31.2	30.1	5.1	.7	2.7	12.6	11.6
2001	29.2	33.6	28.9	5.1	.5	2.7	11.7	11.4
2001 Post-Sept 11	30.9	31.8	27.9	5.2	.6	3.6	11.7	9.4
2001 Pre-Sept 11	28.2	34.6	29.5	5.0	.5	2.1	11.7	12.5
2000	27.5	32.5	29.5	5.9	.5	4.0	11.6	11.6
1999	26.6	33.5	33.7	3.9	.5	1.9	13.0	14.5
1998	27.5	33.2	31.9	4.6	.4	2.4	11.8	13.5
1997	28.2	33.3	31.9	4.0	.4	2.3	12.3	13.8
1996	29.2	32.7	33.0	5.2	--	--	12.7	15.6
1995	31.4	29.7	33.4	5.4	--	--	14.4	12.9
1994	29.8	31.8	33.8	4.6	--	--	14.3	12.6
1993	27.4	33.8	34.0	4.8	--	--	11.8	14.7
1992	27.7	32.7	35.7	3.9	--	--	13.8	15.8
1991	30.9	31.4	33.2	4.5	--	--	14.6	10.8
1990	31.0	33.1	29.1	6.8	--	--	12.4	11.3
1989	33	33	34	--	--	--	--	--
1987	26	35	39	--	--	--	--	--