

Americans Should be Allowed to Have Guns, Say Large Majorities

Many Favor Stricter Gun Control, though in Fewer Numbers

New York, N.Y. – June 16, 2010 – Large majorities of Americans feel that they should be allowed to have guns. At the same time, pluralities of Americans favor stricter control of guns, particularly hand guns, although this number has decreased significantly in the past few years.

These are some of the findings of a **Harris Poll**[®] survey of 2,503 U.S. adults surveyed online between May 10 and 17, 2010 by **Harris Interactive**.

Specifically, other important findings from the survey include:

- A plurality of adults (45%) favor stricter gun control and 26% favor *less* strict gun control. However, the percentage who favors stricter gun control has decreased since 2008 when a 49% to 20% plurality felt this way;
- Concerning control of *hand guns*, half (50%) of adults favor stricter laws and a quarter (23%) favor less strict laws. These percentages have also changed since 2008 when a 54% majority favored stricter laws relating to the control of hand guns;
- Most Republicans and Americans who own guns favor less strict laws controlling guns and hand-guns. Conversely, most Democrats and those who do not own guns favor stricter control of guns and hand guns.

A third of adults (32%) acknowledge that they have a gun at home today, translating into approximately 42 million households (based on about 130 million households). Among those who have a gun at home:

- Three-quarters (74%) have a rifle or shot-gun
- Nearly 7 in 10 (68%) have a hand-gun
- Almost 1 in 5 (17%) have a semi-automatic weapon
- Nearly 1 in 10 (8%) have another type of gun.

Large majorities of U.S. adults think that Americans should be allowed to have rifles or shotguns (80%) and hand-guns (74%). Fewer, but still substantial numbers, think that unconcealed (or “open carry”) weapons (50%) and concealed weapons (45%) should be allowed. Significant minorities also think that Americans should be permitted to have an unlimited number of guns (38%) and semi-automatic weapons (30%).

- Not surprisingly, gun owners are much more likely to think that Americans should be allowed to have guns. For example, nine out of ten gun owners think people should be allowed to have rifles (91%) or hand-guns (90%). Two-thirds think that “open carry” weapons should be allowed.
- However, there is an important exception. Over nine in ten (92%) adults feel that those on the FBI “terrorist watch list” should not be allowed to buy gun. Even as American citizens, only a slightly smaller percentage (87%) think those on the FBI terrorist watch list should not be allowed to buy guns in the U.S.

When *The Harris Poll* showed wording from the U.S. Constitution’s Second Amendment—the clause often cited by gun enthusiasts as the legal justification for owning guns—Harris Interactive found:

- By 43% to 13%, a three to one plurality believes that the Second Amendment supports an individual’s right to bear arms, rather than a state’s right to form a militia. Interestingly, three in ten (31%) feel the Amendment supports both, and 8 percent say the Amendment supports neither.
- By political party affiliation, Republicans, by 53% to 6%, believe the Second Amendment supports individuals’ right to bear arms. Democrats also agree, though by a closer 38% to 19% margin.
- Independents are similar, with 44% to 13% stating that the amendment supports an individual’s right to bear arms.
- Among gun owners, a majority (51%) feels the amendment supports an individual’s right to bear arms and only 7% do not feel this way.

So what?

Since Americans feel strongly that the U.S. Constitution allows for an individual’s right to bear arms, it’s not all together surprising that many Americans think having guns should be allowed—in fact, over 80 million American adults have firearms today. However, the right to have a gun, and the need to have it regulated are not mutually exclusive. To this point, almost twice as many Americans support stricter, rather than less strict, gun control. Similarly, a plurality of Americans (41% to 23%) give President Barack Obama negative marks for his handling of gun control issues, highlighting the delicate balancing act for the administration to find a way to protect Americans’ right to own guns, while passing legislation to regulate their use.

**TABLE 1
PRESIDENT OBAMA AND GUN CONTROL**

“Now we’d like to ask you some questions about gun issues. How good a job do you think President Barack Obama is doing in handling gun control issues in the United States?”

Base: All adults

	Total	Political Party			Own Guns	
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Good (NET)	23	10	34	20	24	24
Excellent	5	2	8	4	6	5
Pretty good	18	8	26	16	18	19
Not good (NET)	41	57	29	43	48	34
Only fair	18	18	22	15	21	17
Poor	23	39	7	28	27	17
Not at all sure	37	33	37	37	28	42

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding

TABLE 2
FAVOR STRICTER OR LESS STRICT GUN CONTROL

“In general, would you say you favor stricter gun control, or less strict gun control?”

Base: All Adults

	1998	1999	2000	2004	2008	2010	Political Party			Own Guns	
							Rep.	Dem.	Ind.	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Stricter	69	63	63	52	49	45	22	70	37	29	59
Less strict	23	25	28	22	20	26	42	7	34	42	12
Neither*	7	10	6	20	21	20	27	14	23	24	18
Don't know/Refused	1	2	4	7	10	10	9	9	7	5	11

*There is a change in the question in 2004. In the previous surveys “neither” was not *offered* as a possible response but was accepted if given. In this new survey it *was offered* as a possible response.

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding

TABLE 3
FAVOR STRICTER OR LESS STRICT CONTROLLING HAND GUNS

“In general, would you say you favor stricter or less strict laws relating to the control of *hand guns*?”

Base: All Adults

	1998	1999	2000	2004	2008	2010	Political Party			Own Guns	
							Rep.	Dem.	Ind.	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Stricter	76	73	72	57	54	50	30	73	43	36	64
Less strict	19	20	20	18	18	23	38	6	29	37	10
Neither*	5	5	6	19	18	19	23	15	20	25	16
Don't know/Refused	*	2	2	6	10	8	8	6	8	3	10

*There is a change in the question in 2004. In the previous surveys “neither” was not *offered* as a possible response but was accepted if given. In this new survey it *was offered* as a possible response.

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.

TABLE 4
MEANING OF SECOND AMENDMENT

“The Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution reads:

“A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the People to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.”

Which of the following do you believe the Second Amendment supports?”

Base: All adults

	2008	2010	Political Party			Own Guns	
			Rep.	Dem.	Ind.	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
An individual's right to bear arms	41	43	53	38	44	51	37
A State's right to form a militia	17	13	6	19	13	7	17
Neither	5	5	2	9	4	2	8
Both	29	31	34	24	33	35	29
Not sure	7	8	4	10	5	4	10

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.

**TABLE 5
TYPES OF WEAPONS ALLOWED**

“Do you think Americans should be allowed to have each of the following items?”

Base: All adults

	Yes	No	Own Guns (Percent Saying Yes)	
			Yes	No
			%	%
Rifles/Shotguns	80	20	91	71
Hand-guns	74	26	90	62
“Open carry”, or unconcealed weapons	50	50	66	37
Concealed weapons	45	55	60	32
Unlimited number of guns	38	62	59	22
Semi-automatic weapons	30	70	45	17

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.

**TABLE 6
PERSONS ON FBI TERRORIST WATCH LIST**

“Do you think persons listed on the FBI’s “terrorist watch list”, or suspected terrorists should be allowed to buy guns in the United States?”

Base: All adults

	Total
	%
Yes	2
No	92
Not at all sure	6

Note: percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding

**TABLE 7
AMERICAN CITIZENS ON FBI TERRORIST WATCH LIST**

“Do you think American citizens listed on the FBI’s “terrorist watch list”, or suspected terrorists should be allowed to buy guns in the United States?”

Base: All adults

	Total
	%
Yes	5
No	87
Not at all sure	7

Note: percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding

**TABLE 8
GUN OWNERSHIP**

"Do you happen to have in your home or garage any guns or revolvers?"

Base: All adults

	Total
	%
Have a gun or revolver in home	32
No, don't have guns	56
Not sure	1
Decline to answer	11

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 9
GUNS IN THE HOME**

"Which of the following do you have?"

Base: Adults who have a gun in the home

	2010 (among those who own guns)	2010 (among all adults)
	%	%
Rifle or shotgun	74	23
Hand-gun	68	21
Semi-automatic weapon	17	5
Another type of gun	8	3
Not at all sure	2	*

Methodology

This **Harris Poll** was conducted online within the United States between May 10 and 17, 2010 among 2,503 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Where appropriate, these data were also weighted to reflect the composition of the adult online population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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Q955, Q960, Q965, Q970, Q976, Q980, Q982, Q985, Q990

The Harris Poll® #77, June 16, 2010

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