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# **Attitudes Towards and Experiences with Guns: A State-Level Perspective**

## **Key Findings**

**March 2000**

## Introduction

While national surveys on public attitudes toward firearms and firearms regulation are common, rarely do surveys look at respondents across the nation by region or state. This summary offers key findings on the nine census regions<sup>1</sup> and four of the most populated states<sup>2</sup> from a study conducted by Tom W. Smith and Luis Martos at the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. The study, *Attitudes Towards and Experiences with Guns: A State-Level Perspective* is a new, first-time regional and state analysis of information gathered by NORC utilizing three resources: the annual National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS) for the years 1996, 1997, and 1998, which is conducted by NORC; the annual General Social Survey, which has been conducted by NORC since 1972; and the archives of the National Network of State Polls. Information contained in this summary has been pooled together from the National Gun Policy Survey for the years 1996, 1997, and 1998. The NGPS is the most comprehensive annual survey on national gun attitudes conducted in the United States. Data from the three years were calculated by NORC to obtain these new regional and state numbers.

This summary has been developed by the Violence Policy Center for ease of access to some of the key findings of *Attitudes Towards and Experiences with Guns: A State-Level Perspective*. Copies of the full study are available from the Violence Policy Center. The full text of the report is also available in PDF format on the Violence Policy Center's web site located at [www.vpc.org](http://www.vpc.org).

This summary contains a series of charts offering regional and state information on public attitudes regarding: banning handguns; federal safety regulation of the gun industry; and, concealed carry laws. It also offers regional and state information on gun possession and handgun purchases. Additional information on public attitudes regarding specific gun policy initiatives is contained in the full study. Highlights of this summary include—

### Handgun Ban

While only 25 percent of Americans own a handgun, 37 percent of Americans favor "a law that would ban the possession of handguns except for the police and other authorized persons." A majority (51 percent) of Middle Atlantic residents favor a handgun ban. Nearly 47 percent of New England residents favor a handgun ban, as do 40 percent of East North Central residents. Nearly six out of 10 New Yorkers (59 percent) favor a handgun ban. For many regions, more residents favor a handgun ban than *own* handguns.

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<sup>1</sup> The nine census regions are: New England, Middle Atlantic, East North Central, West North Central, South Atlantic, East South Central, West South Central, Mountain, and Pacific. Please see page three for a listing of the states contained in each census region.

<sup>2</sup> The four states are California, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

## **Federal Safety Regulation of the Gun Industry**

Currently, the firearms industry is the only manufacturer of a consumer product that is specifically exempt from federal safety regulation. The survey found that federal safety regulation of the gun industry is favored by nearly 73 percent of the American public. Federal safety regulation of the firearms industry is favored by more than 70 percent of the residents in the following regions: New England, Middle Atlantic, West North Central, South Atlantic, West South Central, and Pacific. In the remaining regions, federal safety regulation is supported by at least 67 percent of residents. In each state more than 70 percent of residents supported federal safety regulation of the industry.

## **Concealed Carry**

Less than 40 percent of Americans feel safer with a concealed weapons law. The only region of the country where a majority of residents feel safer as the result of a concealed weapons law is the East South Central. In none of the four states do the majority of residents feel safer with a concealed weapons law. A majority in every region—except for the East South Central region and West South Central region and Texas—want concealed carry licenses restricted.

Additional information on specific firearm issues in chart format is contained in Sections One and Two of this summary. Section One offers information for the United States and the nine census regions. Section Two offers information for the states of California, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

## Section One

### Information for the United States and the Nine Census Regions

Section One contains selected information on the public's attitudes towards guns for the United States and the nine census regions from *Attitudes Towards and Experiences with Guns: A State-Level Perspective*. The nine census regions are:

- **New England**                      *Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont*
- **Middle Atlantic**                      *New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania*
- **East North Central**                      *Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin*
- **West North Central**                      *Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, South Dakota*
- **South Atlantic**                      *District of Columbia, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia*
- **East South Central**                      *Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee*
- **West South Central**                      *Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas*
- **Mountain**                      *Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming*
- **Pacific**                      *Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington*

**Percent Who Want a Law Banning the Possession of Handguns<sup>3</sup>**

United States	36.6
New England	46.5
Middle Atlantic	51.0
East North Central	40.2
West North Central	28.9
South Atlantic	35.3
East South Central	27.1
West South Central	29.3
Mountain	28.9
Pacific	33.9

**Percent Who Own a Long Gun Only, Handgun Only, or Both a Handgun and a Long Gun<sup>4</sup>**

Region	Long Gun Only	Handgun Only	Both
United States	15.4	6.1	18.7
New England	16.5	3.8	12.7
Middle Atlantic	11.1	3.5	11.3
East North Central	17.2	4.3	15.8
West North Central	27.1	3.4	18.0
South Atlantic	11.3	7.6	20.4
East South Central	22.2	11.6	28.4
West South Central	18.6	7.1	26.4
Mountain	16.2	6.7	26.5
Pacific	10.5	7.2	16.4

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<sup>3</sup> Question wording: "Do you think there should be a law that would ban the possession of handguns except for the police and other authorized persons?" Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

<sup>4</sup> Question wording: "Do you happen to have, in your home, car, or garage, any guns? Are any of them handguns? Are any of them shotguns? Are any of them rifles?" Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

### Gun Ownership by Type<sup>5</sup> Compared to Support for a Handgun Ban<sup>6</sup>

Region	Handgun Only	Both Handgun and Long Gun	Total Handgun Ownership	Support for Handgun Ban
United States	6.1	18.7	24.8	36.6
New England	3.8	12.7	16.5	46.5
Middle Atlantic	3.5	11.3	14.8	51.0
East North Central	4.3	15.8	20.1	40.2
West North Central	3.4	18.0	21.4	28.9
South Atlantic	7.6	20.4	28.0	35.3
East South Central	11.6	28.4	40.0	27.1
West South Central	7.1	26.4	33.5	29.3
Mountain	6.7	26.5	33.2	28.9
Pacific	7.2	16.4	23.6	33.9

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<sup>5</sup> Question wording: "Do you happen to have, in your home, car, or garage, any guns? Are any of them handguns? Are any of them shotguns? Are any of them rifles?" Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

<sup>6</sup> Question wording: "Do you think there should be a law that would ban the possession of handguns except for the police and other authorized persons?" Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

### Percent Who Ever Purchased a Handgun<sup>7</sup>

United States	22.1
New England	11.8
Middle Atlantic	13.3
East North Central	17.4
West North Central	17.1
South Atlantic	26.0
East South Central	28.9
West South Central	29.3
Mountain	29.7
Pacific	25.7

### Percent Who Have a Gun in Household<sup>8</sup>

United States	39.6
New England	32.6
Middle Atlantic	25.5
East North Central	37.4
West North Central	47.7
South Atlantic	38.3
East South Central	60.8
West South Central	51.1
Mountain	48.8
Pacific	33.5

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<sup>7</sup> Question wording: "Have you ever purchased a handgun?" Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

<sup>8</sup> Question wording: "Do you happen to have, in your home, car, or garage, any guns?" Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

**Percent Who Say Guns Make Homes Less Safe<sup>9</sup>**

United States	45.1
New England	64.4
Middle Atlantic	53.4
East North Central	46.6
West North Central	41.8
South Atlantic	39.7
East South Central	24.9
West South Central	37.1
Mountain	40.9
Pacific	52.6

**Percent Who Favor Federal Safety Regulations for Gun Design<sup>10</sup>**

United States	72.5
New England	71.2
Middle Atlantic	75.0
East North Central	68.5
West North Central	74.0
South Atlantic	74.5
East South Central	68.9
West South Central	76.5
Mountain	67.0
Pacific	72.5

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<sup>9</sup> Question wording: "Do you think that a gun makes a home much safer, safer, less safe, or much less safe?" Percent indicates those responding "less safe" or "much less safe." Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

<sup>10</sup> Question wording: "Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose government safety regulations for the design of guns?" Percent indicates those responding "strongly favor" or "favor." Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

**Percent Who Want Concealed Carry Licenses Restricted<sup>11</sup>**

United States	57.0
New England	61.8
Middle Atlantic	68.6
East North Central	62.0
West North Central	60.1
South Atlantic	54.9
East South Central	37.9
West South Central	42.2
Mountain	58.5
Pacific	57.9

**Percent Who Feel Safer With a Concealed Weapons Law<sup>12</sup>**

United States	38.6
New England	34.7
Middle Atlantic	33.0
East North Central	33.3
West North Central	33.9
South Atlantic	41.3
East South Central	54.2
West South Central	40.6
Mountain	42.3
Pacific	40.0

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<sup>11</sup> Question wording: "Should licenses to carry concealed firearms be issued to any adult who has passed a criminal background check and a gun safety course or only to people with a special need to carry a concealed gun such as private detectives?" Percent indicates those responding "only to people with a special need." Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

<sup>12</sup> Question wording: "Do laws allowing an adult to carry a concealed gun in public, provided they pass a criminal background check and a gun safety course, make you feel more or less safe?" Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

## **Section Two**

### **Information for the States of California, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas**

Section Two contains selected information on the public's attitudes on guns for the states of California, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas from *Attitudes Towards and Experiences with Guns: A State-Level Perspective*.

**Percent Who Want a Law Banning the Possession of Handguns<sup>13</sup>**

California	36.9
New York	58.8
Pennsylvania	36.9
Texas	31.4

**Percent Who Own a Long Gun Only, Handgun Only, or Both<sup>14</sup>**

State	Long Gun Only	Handgun Only	Both
California	8.9	7.0	15.6
New York	9.7	2.7	8.2
Pennsylvania	14.7	4.2	16.3
Texas	15.2	7.3	22.3

**Percent Who Ever Purchased a Handgun<sup>15</sup>**

California	26.1
New York	11.8
Pennsylvania	14.3
Texas	27.8

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<sup>13</sup> Question wording: "Do you think there should be a law that would ban the possession of handguns except for the police and other authorized persons?" Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

<sup>14</sup> Question wording: "Do you happen to have, in your home, car, or garage, any guns? Are any of them handguns? Are any of them shotguns? Are any of them rifles?" Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

<sup>15</sup> Question wording: "Have you ever purchased a handgun?" Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

**Gun Ownership by Type<sup>16</sup> Compared to Support for a Handgun Ban<sup>17</sup>**

State	Handgun Only	Both Handgun and Long Gun	Total Handgun Ownership	Support for Handgun Ban
California	7.0	15.6	22.6	36.9
New York	2.7	8.2	10.9	58.8
Pennsylvania	4.2	16.3	20.5	36.9
Texas	7.3	22.3	29.6	31.4

**Percent Who Have a Gun in Household<sup>18</sup>**

California	31.0
New York	20.4
Pennsylvania	34.5
Texas	44.6

**Percent Who Say Guns Make Homes Less Safe<sup>19</sup>**

California	52.4
New York	58.8
Pennsylvania	45.4
Texas	40.5

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<sup>16</sup> Question wording: "Do you happen to have, in your home, car, or garage, any guns? Are any of them handguns? Are any of them shotguns? Are any of them rifles?" Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

<sup>17</sup> Question wording: "Do you think there should be a law that would ban the possession of handguns except for the police and other authorized persons?" Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

<sup>18</sup> Question wording: "Do you happen to have, in your home, car, or garage, any guns?" Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

<sup>19</sup> Question wording: "Do you think that a gun makes a home much safer, safer, less safe, or much less safe?" Percent indicates those responding "less safe" or "much less safe." Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

**Percent Who Favor Federal Safety Regulations for Gun Design<sup>20</sup>**

California	74.3
New York	78.8
Pennsylvania	72.0
Texas	76.8

**Percent Who Want Concealed Carry Licenses Restricted<sup>21</sup>**

California	65.0
New York	73.1
Pennsylvania	60.2
Texas	39.7

**Percent Who Feel Safer With a Concealed Weapons Law<sup>22</sup>**

California	40.4
New York	31.0
Pennsylvania	37.2
Texas	41.1

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<sup>20</sup> Question wording: "Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose government safety regulations for the design of guns?" Percent indicates those responding "strongly favor" or "favor." Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

<sup>21</sup> Question wording: "Should licenses to carry concealed firearms be issued to any adult who has passed a criminal background check and a gun safety course or only to people with a special need to carry a concealed gun such as private detectives?" Percent indicates those responding "only to people with a special need." Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.

<sup>22</sup> Question wording: "Do laws allowing an adult to carry a concealed gun in public, provided they pass a criminal background check and a gun safety course, make you feel more or less safe?" Source: National Gun Policy Survey, 1996-1998.