

Large majority of Americans—including gun owners—support stronger gun policies

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A large majority of Americans—including gun owners—continue to support stronger policies to prevent gun violence than are present in current federal and most state law, according to a new national public opinion survey conducted by researchers with the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research at the Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The [survey](#) is a follow-up to one conducted by the same researchers in early 2013, shortly after the shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut that left 26 dead.

The results are published online in *Preventive Medicine*.

"Two years after the tragedy in Newtown, our study of public support for two dozen specific [gun](#) policies found a large majority of Americans continue to favor a range of gun-safety policies," says lead study author Colleen Barry, PhD, MPP, an associate professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "Support was strongest - with little difference between gun-owners and non-owners - for universal [background checks](#), barring people with temporary restraining orders for domestic violence from having guns and stronger regulations of licensed gun dealers."

Support for requiring background checks for all [gun sales](#) remained high, with 85 percent of gun owners and 83 percent of non-owners favoring the policy. In the 2013 survey, 84 percent of gun owners and 90 percent of non-owners supported background checks for all gun sales.

Support for banning assault weapons among all respondents decreased from 69 percent in 2013 to 63 percent in 2015, and support for banning the sale of large capacity ammunition magazines decreased from 68 percent to 60 percent. Notably, the small erosion in support for these policies occurred almost entirely among non-gun-owners.

The 2015 national survey was conducted two years from the date the 2013 survey was fielded, and used the same sampling approach and survey research firm, GfK. The latest survey included 1,326 respondents, while 2013 survey included 2,703 participants.

More than 11,000 people in the United States are killed each year as a result of gun homicides, and the firearm homicide rate in the U.S. is seven times higher than in the average high-income country.

"The extraordinarily high rate of [gun violence](#) in the U.S. is due in large part to weaknesses in our standards for legal gun ownership and laws to hold individuals accountable if they put guns into the wrong hands," says study author Daniel Webster, ScD, MPH, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research. "Yet when we poll Americans, we see strong support even among gun owners for stricter standards and increased accountability."

In the 2015 survey, the majority of gun owners surveyed support prohibiting a person convicted of a serious crime as a juvenile from having a gun for 10 years (73 percent), prohibiting people who have been convicted of public display of gun in a threatening manner excluding self-defense from having a gun for 10 years (75 percent), and prohibiting people convicted of domestic violence from having a gun for 10 years (76 percent).

Similarly, the majority of gun owners (67 percent) also support allowing cities to sue licensed gun dealers when the gun dealer's sales practices

allow criminals to obtain guns and requiring a mandatory minimum sentence of two years in prison for a person convicted of knowingly selling a gun to someone who cannot legally have one (71 percent).

"All too often, pollsters ask Americans whether they support more or less [gun control](#), or frame gun policies as controls on gun ownership generally rather than as measures to keep guns from criminals or other high-risk groups," Barry says. "When you drill down to specific policies, you see that Americans are very much in [support](#) of common-sense regulations to keep their families and communities safe from gun violence."

More information: "Two years after Newtown—public opinion on gun policy revisited" *Preventive Medicine*, 2015.

Provided by Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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