

# Public Opinion about Gun Policies

Tom W. Smith

**O**n contentious issues such as gun control, where advocacy groups on both sides claim to have the weight of public opinion behind them, polling can help clarify what Americans really think. Three decades of polling have painted a clear picture of public opinion about gun control. These polls show that public support for the regulation of firearms is strong, deep, and widespread.<sup>1</sup> Large majorities back most policies to control the manufacture and sale of guns, increase gun safety, and restrict criminals from acquiring firearms. This general support for gun control extends to policies specifically intended to prevent children's access to guns and reduce youth gun violence.

This article outlines the level of public support for gun control measures. It begins with a description of Americans' broad-based support for virtually every type of firearms regulation and an assessment of how strongly gun control supporters feel about the issue. The next section of this article focuses on Americans' attitudes toward firearms regulation to protect children and youth. The article concludes with an examination of historical trends in public opinion about guns—mak-

ing the point that American public opinion about gun control is fixed and unlikely to change much over time.

The article relies primarily on public opinion polling data from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago.<sup>2</sup> The NORC General Social Survey currently polls 3,000 Americans biennially regarding their attitudes on social issues. Since 1972, it has assessed Americans' attitudes toward firearms regulation. From 1996 to 1999, NORC also conducted the annual National Gun Policy Survey. Taken together, the NORC data provide the most complete picture available of American public opinion about guns and of how public opinion has evolved over time.<sup>3</sup>

## Support for Gun Control Measures

From 1996 to 1999, NORC conducted four National Gun Policy Surveys, each of which asked a representative sample of 1,200 Americans their views on three types of gun control policies: general gun control, gun safety, and restriction of criminals' access to guns.

General gun control consists of policies to regulate the manufacture and sale of guns. Such measures include requiring police permits, background checks, waiting periods, or licensing and registration for all gun owners.

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Table 1

Support for General Gun Control Measures<sup>a</sup>

Gun Control Measure	% in Support
Tamper-resistant serial numbers on guns (97–98)	89.6
Police permit needed before gun may be purchased (GSS)	82.0
Mandatory background check and five-day waiting period for gun purchases	80.7
Mandatory registration of handguns	80.0
Must be 21 to buy handgun	79.9
Require background check for private sales of guns	78.6
Restrict sales of handgun ammunition like handguns themselves	73.4
Willing to pay \$25 in taxes to reduce gun injuries (97–98)	71.4
Keep guns from criminals, even if that makes it harder for law-abiding citizens to obtain guns	69.8
Prohibit gun imports not allowed in country of origin (98)	69.2
Ban high-capacity ammunition magazines	66.6
Handgun owners must at least be licensed and trained <sup>b</sup>	65.7
Mandatory registration of rifles/shotguns	61.3
Concealed carrying only for those with special needs	55.9
Prohibit importing of guns (98)	55.1
Ban “Saturday night specials” (98) <sup>c</sup>	54.2–58.2
General concealed-carrying laws make communities less safe	45.2
Ban possession of handguns, except by police or authorized persons (98)	38.5
Total ban on handguns	12.8

Source: Smith, T.W. 1999 *National gun policy survey of the National Opinion Research Center: Research findings*. Chicago, IL: NORC, 2000.

<sup>a</sup> Results are from the 1999 national gun policy survey, except as marked otherwise. For question wording, see Smith, 2000.

<sup>b</sup> 12.8% wanted a “total ban of handgun ownership,” and 52.9% said that “handgun owners should be licensed by the government and complete mandatory training.” Therefore, 65.7% favored licensing or a more stringent measure.

<sup>c</sup> See alternative wording in Smith, 2000. For the meaning and use of the term “Saturday night special,” see Oliver, C. A new way to control crime? “Saturday night specials” bans haven’t worked. *Investor’s Business Daily*, February 6, 1996, at A1.

As Table 1 indicates, large majorities of respondents to the NORC National Gun Policy Surveys support this type of gun control, particularly when it comes to handguns. In the 1999 poll, for example, nearly 81% of respondents supported a background check and a five-day waiting period before a handgun could be purchased; 80% endorsed mandatory registration of handguns; and some 54% to 58% wanted to ban domestic manufacture of “small, easily concealed, and inexpensive handguns.”<sup>4</sup> Of the 11 general gun control measures that NORC asked about in 1999, the average respondent supported 7.<sup>5</sup>

Women, residents of large cities and their suburbs, liberals, and Democrats are most likely to support general gun control measures, whereas men, residents of rural areas, conservatives, and Republicans are least likely to support such measures. People with higher levels of educational attainment also are more likely to support general gun control measures. Support does not vary by marital status, age, or income.

The second type of gun control measure, gun safety, consists of policies designed to make guns safer and less accessible to unauthorized users such as children. These measures include establishing federal consumer product

safety standards for guns, requiring that guns be childproof, and requiring gun owners to store their guns safely (that is, locked and unloaded). As Table 2 shows, support for safety-related gun control measures is even stronger than support for measures to regulate the sale of guns. Substantial majorities consistently support most safety-related policies, especially federal safety standards for handguns and requirements that guns be childproof. (See the article by Teret and Culross in this journal issue.) Of the 11 gun safety measures that NORC polled in 1999, the average respondent supported 8.<sup>6</sup>

As with general gun control measures, women, residents of large cities and their suburbs, liberals, and Democrats are most likely to support gun safety measures, whereas men, residents of rural areas, con-

servatives, and Republicans are least likely to support them. Support does not vary by income or education, but younger adults are more likely to support gun safety measures than are people over age 50.

Finally, the NORC surveys asked about policies aimed at restricting criminals' access to guns. Such measures include prohibiting gun purchases by people convicted of certain crimes and increasing sentences for those convicted of using guns in crime. As Table 3 shows, most Americans want to keep guns out of the hands of criminals—even those convicted of misdemeanors—and to punish the criminal misuse of guns. In the 1999 poll, as Table 1 indicates, nearly 70% of the respondents agreed that “the government should do everything it can to keep handguns out of the hands

## Table 2

### Support for Gun Safety Measures<sup>a</sup>

Gun Safety Measure	% in Support
Require federal handgun safety standards	94.1
Federal handgun safety standards even if it makes guns more expensive	86.3
Require that all new handguns be childproof	85.6
Gun buyers must take gun safety course	84.7
Require that new handguns have magazine safety (97–98) <sup>b</sup>	81.9
Make manufacturers liable for injuries from defects in guns (97–98)	79.3
Make owners liable for injuries if gun not stored to prevent misuse by children	76.2
Guns must be stored in locked box or cabinet	74.1
Guns must be stored unloaded	73.9
Require that all new handguns have load indicator (97–98) <sup>c</sup>	73.2
Guns must be stored with trigger lock	72.8
Current gun owners must take gun safety course	68.3
Require federal safety regulations for gun design	66.2
Require that all new handguns be personalized <sup>d</sup>	63.4
Current gun owners who will not take gun safety course should be required to turn in their guns	49.3
Willing to pay \$50 in taxes to enforce personalized handgun law	34.4

Source: Smith, T.W. 1999 *National gun policy survey of the National Opinion Research Center: Research findings*. Chicago, IL: NORC, 2000.

<sup>a</sup> All results are from the 1999 national gun policy survey, except as marked otherwise. For question wording, see Smith, 2000.

<sup>b</sup> Magazine safeties are devices that prevent a gun from being fired if the magazine has been removed from the gun.

<sup>c</sup> Load indicators are devices that indicate whether guns are loaded.

<sup>d</sup> Personalized guns, or “smart guns,” would incorporate fingerprint recognition or other technology so that only authorized users could fire the guns.

of criminals, even if it means that it will be harder for law-abiding citizens to purchase handguns.”

### Policies That Draw Public Opposition

One type of gun control policy draws consistent public opposition: the general prohibition of guns. In the 1998 poll, less than 39% of respondents supported restricting the possession of handguns to “the police and other authorized persons”; in 1999, less than 13% wanted a “total ban on handguns.” These numbers indicate that the public’s support for firearms regulation does have its limits.

Indeed, despite a general desire for stronger firearms regulation, many Americans feel that an armed citizenry makes for a safer community. This attitude can be seen in poll findings regarding “concealed-carry” laws, which allow law-abiding citizens to carry concealed weapons in most public places. In recent years, at least 29 states have enacted “shall-issue” concealed-weapons laws, which require states to issue concealed-weapons permits to any adult who passes a criminal background check (and in some cases completes a gun safety course). A narrow plurality of Americans, some 45%, believe that shall-issue con-

cealed-carry laws make communities less safe, whereas 44% feel that these laws make communities safer.<sup>7</sup>

### Strength of Public Support for Gun Control

Contrary to popular beliefs about the strength of support for gun rights, the NORC data indicate that gun control advocates are at least as strong in their support for gun control as opponents are in their opposition. Gun control advocates have engaged in slightly more political actions (such as contacting politicians) than their opponents have. Pro-gun control candidates pick up more votes than anti-gun control candidates in hypothetical congressional races. In addition, people who rank crime and violence as the nation’s top problem support more gun control measures than those less concerned about crime.<sup>8</sup>

## Gun Control and Violence Prevention Policies Aimed at Children and Youth

The NORC National Gun Policy Surveys also asked American adults their opinions regarding gun control policies designed to prevent children and youth from using firearms. The data here tell a story similar to that told by polling data on more general gun control

### Table 3

#### Attitudes toward Guns and Criminal Activity

##### Percentage Who Support Prohibiting Gun Sales to Criminals Convicted of...

Domestic violence	90.4
Drunk and disorderly conduct (97–98)	83.6
Carrying a concealed weapon without a permit	82.6
Assault and battery that does not involve a lethal weapon or serious injury	81.8
Driving under the influence of alcohol	66.5

Percentage Who Support a Waiting Period and \$25 Fee to Pay for Background Checks 78.9

##### Percentage Who Support Tougher Penalties for Criminal Gun Use

Double sentence if gun used during crime	78.2
Treat illegal gun possession as a serious crime	81.6

Source: Smith, T.W. 1999 *National gun policy survey of the National Opinion Research Center: Research findings*. Chicago, IL: NORC, 2000. For question wording, see Smith, 2000.

Table 4

## Support for Measures to Curb Youth Violence

Measure	% in Support
Expel threatening, violent, and unstable students	81.0
Metal detectors and guards in all schools	73.5
Prohibit ownership/use of firearms to individuals under age 18	68.0
Prohibit guns in homes with anyone under age 18	29.1

Source: Smith, T.W. 1999 *National gun policy survey of the National Opinion Research Center: Research findings*. Chicago, IL: NORC, 2000. For question wording, see Smith, 2000.

measures. Americans strongly support measures to restrict youth access to guns and reduce school violence, but they oppose measures to ban guns from households with children. Perhaps surprisingly, there is little difference between the opinions of parents and nonparents on gun control issues.

#### Support for Restricting Youth Access to Guns

As Table 4 illustrates, the public broadly supports measures to restrict youth access to guns. In 1999, for example, 68% would refuse to allow children under age 18 to own or use firearms. In addition, nearly 80% of NORC survey respondents endorsed banning handgun purchases by youth under age 21. (See Table 1.)

The public also supports product safety measures designed to limit youth access to guns; in 1999, nearly 86% of survey respondents supported requiring that all new handguns be designed so that they “cannot be fired by a young child’s small hands.” And more than 76% believed that owners should be held liable if a gun is not stored properly and is misused by a child. (See Table 2 and the article by Hardy in this journal issue.)

In the aftermath of the 1999 school shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, and in other communities, large majorities of respondents also supported measures to reduce school violence. For example, nearly 74% endorsed having metal detectors and security guards in all middle and high schools.<sup>9</sup>

People also mentioned “availability of guns” as the factor most to blame for the shootings.<sup>10</sup>

But the public does not favor banning guns from households with children. Instead, Americans are more likely to favor measures requiring the safe and secure storage of guns, as indicated in Table 2.

#### Parental Attitudes toward Gun Control

The NORC surveys found little difference between parents and nonparents when it comes to gun control issues. Parents are slightly more supportive of childproofing firearms; 69% of parents strongly favor mandatory childproofing of handguns, compared to 63% of adults without children in the home. Gun ownership does not vary by the presence of children in the household, however, and parenthood has surprisingly little impact on how people think about and use firearms. Parents and nonparents have similar responses to most questions dealing with children, such as gun-owner liability for children’s misuse of unsafely stored guns or measures to restrict the use and ownership of guns by minors.

Parents, however, do remain concerned about their children’s exposure to guns.<sup>11</sup> People with children under age 18 were asked if they would let their child “play in or visit” a house where a handgun is present: 70% said they would allow the visit if the handgun was both “unloaded and locked away,” 33% if the handgun was “loaded but locked away,” and 8% if the handgun was

“loaded and not locked away.” Not surprisingly, gun-owning parents are less opposed to their children being around guns than parents who do not own guns.<sup>12</sup>

## Stability in Public Opinion toward Firearms Regulation

By and large, attitudes toward firearms regulation have shown great stability over the last 40 years. Gun control has been debated at the national level since the mid-1960s, so public opinion on gun control tends to be mature and not subject to large or sudden fluctuations or shifts. Except for a period in the late 1980s and early 1990s when support for gun control measures rose moderately, attitudes have generally remained stable over time.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the little change that has occurred has tended to be back-and-forth, rather than a clear, long-term trend in one direction.

Two factors could account for the stability of these attitudes. First, gun control is a long-debated issue familiar to most people. Second, individuals’ attitudes toward guns are shaped by prior experience with firearms, especially by an individual’s exposure to guns while growing up and by the prominence of guns in the local community. These formative experiences may well fix people’s attitudes toward guns and gun control.

The stability of public attitudes toward gun control can be seen clearly in public reaction to the mass shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, in April 1999. Many gun control advocates expected that Littleton would create a groundswell of support for stronger gun control measures, or at least for measures to restrict youth access to guns. Indeed, the Littleton shootings attracted a tremendous amount of media and public attention.<sup>14</sup>

That media coverage and public attention, however, did not translate into additional support for gun control laws. As Table 5 indicates, Littleton did increase the salience and importance of crime and gun violence in the public’s mind. In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, respondents in public opinion polls became much more likely to mention crime in general or gun violence in particular as the most important problem facing the country.<sup>15</sup> Littleton also brought gun control to the top of people’s minds, advanced its place on

the political agenda,<sup>16</sup> and became a key factor behind the organization of the Million Mom March and other initiatives to pass gun control laws.<sup>17</sup>

Although Littleton may have motivated the majority of the American public who already support gun control laws, it did not change people’s minds about how to address the problem of crime and gun violence. There is little indication that Littleton generally increased support for gun control in the short term and no sign that it did so after six months.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Littleton serves as a powerful example of how fixed Americans’ views of gun control really are. Even a mass school shooting on live television did little to change people’s views on this issue.

## Conclusion

Short of prohibiting guns, Americans strongly favor most measures to regulate firearms. Even most gun owners believe that there should be a set of common-sense regulations to control firearms—just as automobiles are registered, drivers are licensed, and car sales are recorded and documented.

However, support for gun control has its limits. Most Americans oppose outright bans or severe limits on gun ownership. Moreover, a significant minority of Americans remain firmly opposed to many gun control policies, and opinions on gun control, whether for or against, tend to remain fixed over time. Regardless of how they feel about guns, Americans are unlikely to change their minds on the issue.

This finding may help explain why gun control policies have been slow to change, despite broad public support for tighter regulation of firearms. Although support for gun control is strong, it faces significant opposition, which has remained solid despite public events such as the Littleton shootings that some pundits thought would weaken pro-gun public opinion. The battle lines on gun control are well drawn and entrenched. It may be some time before there is significant movement on either side.

Table 5

### Percentage of Public Ranking Guns and Crime as Most Important U.S. Problems/Issues: Pre- and Post-Littleton<sup>a</sup>

	Guns/Gun Control %	Crime/Violence %	Sample Size
<b>Harris Poll (Top Issue)</b>			
Before Littleton			
1/99	1	7	1,008
2/99	1	8	1,007
4/8/99–4/13/99	1	7	1,006
After Littleton			
5/14/99–5/19/99	10	19	1,010
6/99	9	14	1,006
8/99	9	13	1,008
<b>Gallup (Top Problem)</b>			
Before Littleton			
1/99	*	13	1,009
After Littleton			
5/23/99–5/24/99	10	17	1,050
<b>CBS (Top Problem)</b>			
Before Littleton			
1/30/99–2/1/99	–	6	1,058
4/13/99–4/14/99	–	4	878
After Littleton			
4/22/99	3	16	450
5/1/99–5/2/99	3	19	1,151

\* = less than 0.5%

– = not listed as category

Source: Smith, T.W. 1999 *National gun policy survey of the National Opinion Research Center: Research findings*. Chicago, IL: NORC, 2000.

<sup>a</sup> The Littleton shootings took place on April 20, 1999. For question wording and more information on these polls, see Smith, 2000.

## ENDNOTES

1. Dozens of public opinion polls over the last 20 years have documented public support for firearms regulation. See Smith, T.W. The 75% solution: An analysis of the structure of attitudes on gun control, 1959–1977. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* (1980) 71(3):300–16; Stinchcombe, A.L., Adams, R., Heimer, C.A., et al. *Crime and punishment: Changing attitudes in America*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980; Wright, J.D. Public opinion and gun control: A comparison of results from two recent national surveys. *The Annals, American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications (May 1981) 455:24–39; Crocker, R. Attitudes toward gun control: A review. In *Federal regulation of firearms*. Congressional Research Service, ed. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1982; Tyler, T.R., and Lavrakas, P.J. Support for gun control: The influence of personal, sociotropic, and ideological concerns. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* (1983) 13(5):392–405; Wright, J.D. Second thoughts on gun control. *Public Interest* (Spring 1988) 91:23–29; Kleck, G. *Point blank: Guns and violence in America*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991; Mauser, G.A., and Kopel, D.B. “Sorry, wrong number”: Why media polls on gun control are often unreliable. *Political Communication* (1992) 9(2):69–92; Kauder, N.B. One-gun-a-month: Measuring public opinion concerning a gun control initiative. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law* (1993) 11(4):353–60; Vernick, J.S., Teret, S.P., Howard, K.A., et al. Public opinion polling on gun policy. *Health Affairs* (Winter 1993) 12(4):198–208; Hemenway, D., and Azrael, D. Gun use in the United States: Results of a national survey. Unpublished paper. Harvard School of Public Health; Edel, W. *Gun control: Threat to liberty or defense against anarchy*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995; Spitzer, R.J. *The politics of gun control*. Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1995; Adams, K. Guns and gun control. In *Americans view crime and justice: A national public opinion survey*. T.J. Flanagan and D.R. Longmire, eds. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996; Blendon, R.J., Young, J.T., and Hemenway, D. The American public and the gun control debate. *Journal of the American Medical Association* (June 1996) 275(22):1719–22; Kleck, G. Crime, culture conflict and sources of support for gun control. *American Behavioral Scientist* (February 1996) 39(4):387–404; Schuldt, R., Judy, E., Hostetler, B., and McCool, M. Public opinion on allowing citizens to carry concealed handguns: The effect of question wording on majority opinion. Paper presented to the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research. Chicago, IL, November 1997; Carter, G.L. *The gun control movement*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997; Kates, D.B., Jr. Public opinion: The effects of extremist discourse on the gun debate. In *The great American gun debate: Essays on firearms and violence*. D.B. Kates Jr. and G. Kleck, eds. San Francisco: Pacific Research Institute, 1997, pp. 94–122; Kleck, G. *Targeting guns: Firearms and their control*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997; Public Policy Forum. *Public opinion survey*. December 1997; Smith, T.W. *1996 National gun policy survey of the National Opinion Research Center: Research findings*. Chicago, IL: NORC, March 1997; Bowie, A., Chorak, S., Guilbault, R., et al. *Chicagoland gun study*. Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center, 1998; Frank N. Magid Associates. *Iowans’ attitudes towards guns and government regulation of guns—legislative summary*. Frank N. Magid Associates, October 1998; Harding, D.R., Jr. Public opinion and gun control: Appearance and transparency in support and opposition. In *The changing politics of gun control*. J.M. Bruce and C. Wilcox, eds. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998, pp. 196–223; Peter D. Hart Research Associates. *Parents, kids, and guns: A nationwide survey*. Peter D. Hart Research Associates, October 1998; Poll: Most Americans favor stricter gun laws. *Yahoo! News*. May 27, 1998; Michigan Partnership to Prevent Gun Violence. *Michigan statewide survey*. February 1998; Singh, R. Gun control in America. *Political Quarterly* (1998) 69(3):288–96; Smith, T.W. *1997–98 National gun policy survey of the National Opinion Research Center: Research findings*. Chicago, IL: NORC, March 1998; Teret, S.P., Webster, D.W., Vernick, J.S., et al. Support for new policies to regulate firearms. *New England Journal of Medicine* (September 17, 1998) 339(12):813–18; and Smith, T.W. *1998 National gun policy survey of the National Opinion Research Center: Research findings*. Chicago, IL: NORC, March 1999.
2. This report utilizes data primarily from (1) the 1999 National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS-99), (2) the 1998 National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS-98), (3) the 1997–1998 National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS-97), (4) the 1996 National Gun Policy Survey (NGPS-96), and (5) the 1972–1998 General Social Survey (GSS) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. The NGPSs were designed in collaboration with the Center for Gun Policy and Research at The Johns Hopkins University with funding from the Joyce Foundation. The NGPS-96, NGPS-97, NGPS-98, and NGPS-99 are national, random-digit dial telephone surveys of adults living in households with telephones. Data were collected September 13 to November 11, 1996; November 8, 1997, to January 27, 1998; September 10 to November 15, 1998; and September 9 to December 4, 1999, respectively. Analysis used a weight that adjusted for age, gender, race, education, and region according to U.S. Census figures. Full technical details on the NGPSs appear in Haggerty, C.C., and Shin, H. *1996 National gun policy survey: Methodology report*. Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center, January 1997; Woolley, R., Kuby, A.M., and Shin, H. *1997/1998 National gun policy survey: Methodology report*. Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center, 1998; Kuby, A.M., Imhof, L., and Shin, H. *Fall 1998 National gun policy survey: Methodology report*. Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center, 1999; and Kuby, A.M., Imhof, L., and Shin, H. *Fall 1999 National gun policy survey: Methodology report*. Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center, 2000. The GSSs are in-person interviews of adults living in households in the United States. The latest data were collected in February to May 1998. Full technical details are presented in Davis, J.A., Smith, T.W., and Marsden, P.V. *General social surveys, 1972–2000: Cumulative codebook*. Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center, 2001. Supplemental data from various state and national polls are also employed in this article and are cited when used.
3. See note no. 1, Carter, p. 49.
4. Support for a ban on manufacturing increases from 54% to 58% when the descriptor “often known as Saturday night specials” is added. For full question wording, see Smith, T.W. *1999 National gun policy survey of the National Opinion Research Center: Research findings*. Chicago, IL: NORC, 2000. The difference is not statistically significant at the .05 level. For the meaning and use of the term “Saturday night special,” see Oliver, C. A new way to control crime? ‘Saturday night specials’ bans haven’t worked. *Investor’s Business Daily*, February 6, 1996, at A1.
5. There are 19 separate percentages in Table 1 but only 11 distinct items from the 1999 National Gun Policy Survey.
6. There are 16 questions in Table 2 but only 11 involving separate items asked of everyone on the 1999 National Gun Policy Survey.

7. Nine percent feel that shall-issue laws make communities neither more nor less safe, and 3% do not know or have no answer.
8. See note no. 4, Smith, and note no. 1, Smith (1997).
9. A Gallup poll on April 21, 1999, judged the following measures as very effective “as a way to stop violence in high schools and middle schools”: stricter gun control laws for teenagers (62%), increased counseling for teenagers (60%), metal detectors in schools (53%), stricter regulation of violence on TV and in movies (52%), restrictions on what is available to teenagers on the Internet (50%), holding parents legally responsible for crimes their children commit with their parents’ guns (47%), school dress codes (36%), random body searches of students (34%), and stiffer penalties for parents whose children commit crimes (34%). See Saad, L. Columbine could cast long shadow over 2000 election. *Gallup poll release*. Princeton, NJ: Gallup Organization, June 9, 1999.
10. The following were blamed a great deal for “causing shootings like the one in Littleton”: availability of guns (60%); parents (51%); TV programs, movies, and music (49%); social pressures on youth (43%); media coverage of similar incidents (34%); the Internet (34%); and schools (11%). See note no. 9, Saad; and Newport, F. Public continues to believe a variety of factors caused Littleton. *Gallup poll release*. Princeton, NJ: Gallup Organization, May 13, 1999.
11. For information on parents and guns, see note no. 1, Peter D. Hart Research Associates. For information on the safe storage of firearms, see Weil, D.S., and Hemenway, D. Loaded guns in the house: An analysis of a national random survey of gun owners. *Journal of the American Medical Association* (1992) 267(22): 3033-37; and Hemenway, D., Solnick, S.J., and Azrael, D.R. Firearm training and storage. *Journal of the American Medical Association* (1995) 273(1):46-50.
12. Of parents who personally own a gun, 3% do not want their child to visit a household with a locked and unloaded handgun, 41% object if the handgun is loaded but locked away, and 77% are opposed if the handgun is loaded and unlocked. For parents without guns in their household, opposition is respectively 42%, 75%, and 95%. Similarly on NGPS-97, having a visitor with a gun in one’s home is opposed by 44% of those personally owning guns, 68% of those who do not personally own a gun but have one in the home, and 72% of those without guns.
13. See note no. 1, Stinchcombe, et al; Smith (1980); and Smith (1997).
14. The Columbine killings in Littleton, Colorado, garnered the third-highest number of minutes in evening network news coverage in 1999, behind only the war in Kosovo and the President Clinton scandal/impeachment. See TV news. *Time* (December 27, 1999) 54(26):36. Also, The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found Littleton to be the third top news event of the 1990s, with 68% of the public reporting that they were following the story “very closely,” behind only the Rodney King verdict in 1992 (70%) and the crash of TWA flight 800 in 1996 (69%). See The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. *Record news interest in Littleton shooting*. Washington, DC: The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, September 22, 1999. Available online at <http://www.people-press.org/shooting.htm>.
15. Poll responses on problem salience in the last half of 1999 and the first half of 2000 then showed a decline in public concern about and attention toward crime and violence in general and guns in particular.
16. Connolly, C. Littleton alters the landscape of debate on guns. *Washington Post*. May 5, 1999, at A3; Crowder, C. Gun-control opinions unchanged. *Denver Rocky Mountain News*. May 20, 1999, at 5A; Farragher, T. Support seen rising in Congress for gun-control bill. *Boston Globe*. April 23, 1999, at A22; Lester, W. Shootings shift view of guns. *Boston Globe*. May 6, 1999, at A4; and Neikirk, W. Congress resisting push for gun control. *Chicago Tribune*. November 5, 1999, at Sect. 1, p. 13.
17. Bai, M. Don’t mess with the moms. *Newsweek* (May 15, 2000) 135(20):28; Simon, R., and Anderson, N. Mothers march against guns. *Los Angeles Times*. May 15, 2000, at A1; and Toner, R. Mothers rally to assail gun violence. *New York Times*. May 15, 2000, at A1.
18. See note no. 4, Smith; Newport, F. Public continues to believe a variety of factors caused Littleton. *Gallup poll release*. Princeton, NJ: Gallup Organization, May 13, 1999; Gillespie, M. New gun control efforts draw mixed support from Americans. *Gallup poll release*. Princeton, NJ: Gallup Organization, July 13, 1999; Newport, F. Before Colorado tragedy, Americans were becoming slightly less favorable towards gun control. *Gallup poll release*. Princeton, NJ: Gallup Organization, April 22, 1999; Newport, F. Fort Worth shootings again put focus on gun control. *Gallup poll release*. Princeton, NJ: Gallup Organization, September 17, 1999; Newport, F. Gun control support increases modestly in wake of Littleton tragedy. *Gallup poll release*. Princeton, NJ: Gallup Organization, May 3, 1999; and Newport, F. Teenagers and adults differ on causes, cures for Columbine-type situations. *Gallup poll release*. Princeton, NJ: Gallup Organization, May 21, 1999.