

Handguns and Violence

A Survey of California and National Polling

FALL 1994



California is gripped by an epidemic of handgun violence — and it's taking a terrible toll on the children of our state.

More kids die from gunshot wounds than are killed in car crashes and four times as many are killed by gunfire as die from disease, yet there has been little public policy response.

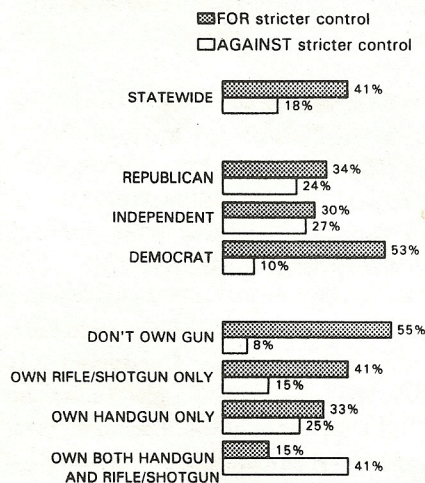
Californians believe that there are steps we can take to stem the tide of handgun violence, and that now is the time to take action.

◆ **The #1 Priority.** Californians view crime and violence as the top problems facing the state.

◆ **Handgun Violence.** Nearly 1 in 3 (30%) Californians know a young person who has been hurt

Handgun Violence and Voting

Would you vote for the candidate for governor who was FOR stricter handgun control or the candidate who was AGAINST stricter handgun control?



Source: EDK Associates for TCWF

or killed by a handgun. Remarkably, nearly half (45%) of all new voters (18- to 24-year-olds) know a young person who has been the victim of handgun violence.

Seven in 10 Californians (69%) worry about the safety of their children and relatives.

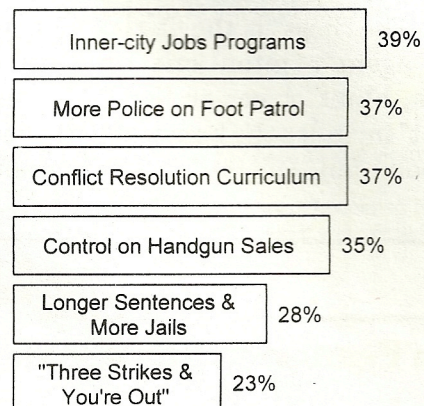
◆ **"Three Strikes" Law Not the Answer.** Given the high visibility of the state's new "Three Strikes and You're Out" law, it is surprising that only 23% believe it will do a lot to reduce violence. Californians feel that we have to move beyond punitive approaches.

Fifty-nine percent agree that "no matter how many prisons we build, we still have more violence. Building more prisons and giving out longer jail sentences is not enough — we need tougher laws to get rid of the handguns." This sentiment garners majority support among Republicans, Democrats and Independents, Anglos, African-Americans and Latinos.

◆ **Real Solutions.** Californians know that any real solution to crime and violence starts with putting a halt to easy access to handguns. Large majorities in the Anglo, African-American and Latino communi-

Approaches to Reducing Violence

% who say would "do a lot to reduce violence"



Source: EDK Associates for TCWF; 600 registered voters in California, polled by telephone, May 8-11, 1994

ties support laws reducing access to handguns; even handgun owners are strongly supportive. And large majorities are confident that handgun control laws would be effective — including majorities of Republicans, Democrats and Independents.

Californians also support other preventive measures, including jobs programs for the inner cities, putting more police on foot patrol, and developing a school curriculum on conflict resolution.

◆ **A Voting Issue.** Handgun control is a voting issue in California. Republicans, Independents and Democrats alike would favor a candidate for governor who supports stricter handgun control over a candidate who opposes stricter handgun control.

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These findings come from a statewide poll commissioned by The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF), and conducted by EDK Associates.

Motivated by the tragic consequences of violent acts in our society, TCWF has established a Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI). TCWF and several collaborative funders have allocated more than \$30 million over a five-year period to develop, implement and evaluate a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to reducing youth violence in California.

The VPI is based on a public health approach that considers host, agent and environmental factors. The "host" is the at-risk man, woman or child. The "agent" of intentional injury is most often a gun, knife, blunt object or fist. The "physical environment" includes the home, neighborhood, workplace, school or jail. And the "social environment" is shaped

by joblessness, oppression, racism, the media, alcohol and other drugs, family disarray and despair.

TCWF believes it is time to move beyond the traditional reactive criminal justice response to violence and to begin to include a preventive public health approach that addresses host, environment, and the agents of injury — the most lethal of which are firearms, especially handguns.

The EDK Associates poll was conducted May 8-11, 1994, among 600 California registered voters. The margin of error is +/- 4 percentage points.

EDK Associates also conducted three regional polls for TCWF — in the San Francisco Bay Area, the San Diego area, and the Fresno area. Those findings are discussed below. Additional California and national polling data, from independent sources, are on pages 3-6.

San Francisco Bay Area

Concern About Crime. Here, as throughout California, crime and violence are top concerns. Bay Area voters have personally been touched by gun violence. One-fifth (19%) say that they have been, or that someone close to them has been, the victim of gun violence within the last five years. Sixty percent express fears for the safety of their children and relatives.

Finding Solutions. People in the Bay Area are confident that public policy solutions can be effective in reducing violence. "Creating jobs programs in inner cities" (61%) and "tighter control on the sale of handguns" (56%) both garner strong majority support as things that could "do a lot to reduce violence." Just 1 in 5 (20%) think "mandating longer sentences and building more jails" would be as effective.

Support for handgun control laws is strong in the African-American, Asian-American, and Anglo communities, and in all income groups. Fully 84% believe that the kind of places handguns can be purchased must be limited, and that handguns should

not be sold in department stores, discount stores, or pharmacies.

A Voting Issue. In the Bay Area, a 52% majority say that they would be more inclined to vote for a candidate for governor who supports stricter handgun control; just 5% would be more likely to support a candidate who opposes stricter control.

(The California Wellness Foundation survey by EDK Associates. Conducted July 21-22, 1994, among 300 Bay Area registered voters. The margin of error is +/- 6 percentage points.)

San Diego

Concern About Crime. Thirty percent of voters in the San Diego area rank crime and violence as the most important problems facing California today. Three quarters (74%) are worried about the safety of their children and relatives.

Many have direct experience of the harm that guns can cause. Fourteen percent say that they have been, or that someone close to them has been, the victim of gun violence within the last five years.

Finding Solutions. San Diegans believe that preventive approaches — like inner-city jobs programs and handgun control — are more effective in the fight against violent crime than longer jail sentences.

Forty-six percent say "creating jobs programs in inner cities" and 45% say "tighter control on the sale of handguns" could "do a lot to reduce violence."

Seven in 10 San Diego voters support handgun control laws, including 68% of Anglos, 70% of African-Americans, and 86% of Asian-Americans. Eighty percent think that handguns should not be sold in department stores, discount stores, or pharmacies.

A Voting Issue. By 48% to 10%, voters in the San Diego area would be more likely to support a candidate for governor who supports stricter handgun control over one who opposes stricter handgun control.

(The California Wellness Foundation survey by EDK Associates. Conducted July 26-27, 1994, among 305 registered voters in the San Diego area. The margin of error is +/- 6 percentage points.)

California: The Field Poll

Pulling on crime and gun violence by the independent Field Institute closely reflects the findings of the EDK Associates surveys conducted for TCWF.

In July, the Field Poll found that Californians view crime as the most serious problem facing their state. Eight in 10 say it is something they are "extremely concerned about."

Earlier this year, the Field Poll took an in-depth look at attitudes about violent crime and the proliferation of guns. They found that:

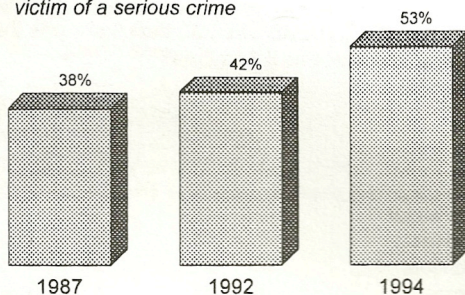
- ◆ Fear of crime has increased dramatically in recent years. The percentage who are *very fearful* has doubled

The Field Poll. Conducted January 9-15, 1994, among 1,008 California adults. The margin of error is +/- 4.5 percentage points. (Each question asked of 1/2 the sample.)

"How fearful are you that you will be the victim of a serious crime? Are you very fearful, somewhat fearful, not too fearful, or not at all fearful?"

Fear of Crime

Percent who fear they will become a victim of a serious crime



in just a two-year period. Among 18- to 29-year-olds, the percentage saying they are very fearful has *tripled*.

- ◆ Californians overwhelmingly reject the notion that owning a gun might make them safer from crime.

- ◆ Seven in 10 believe that existing laws make it too easy to buy a gun. Even a plurality of gun owners think it's too easy.

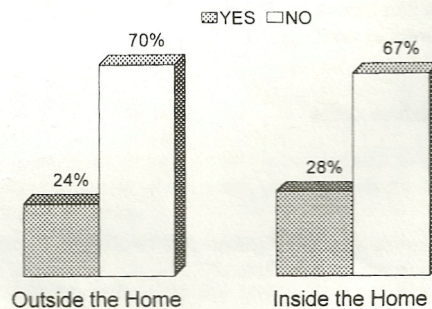
- ◆ A majority of Californians believe that strengthening laws on the possession and sale of guns would reduce violent crime. Nearly 9 in 10 — including 76% of gun owners — would support a law requiring registration of all guns. And a majority of Californians would approve of restricting handgun ownership to people who can demonstrate a definite need for the weapons.

"Do you think you could reduce the chances of becoming a victim of a serious crime if you had a gun in your home, or not?"

"Do you think you could reduce the chances of becoming a victim of a serious crime when you are outside your home if you carried a handgun with you, or not?"

Safer with a Gun?

Would having a gun reduce your chances of becoming the victim of a serious crime?



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Fresno Area

Concern About Crime. Crime and violence are the top problems facing California according to 44% of Fresno-area voters. (In the Latino community, 66% name crime and violence.) More than 8 in 10 (84%) are worried about the safety of their children and relatives. Fourteen percent say that they have been, or that someone close to them has been, the victim of gun violence within the last five years.

Finding Solutions. Putting more police on foot patrol (36%), inner city jobs programs (34%), a conflict resolution curriculum in the schools (33%), longer sentences and more jail cells (32%) are all viewed as things that

could "do a lot to reduce violence."

Handgun control laws are supported by 53% overall, and 82% in the Latino community. Eight in 10 (78%) support greater limits on the places where handguns can be sold, including a ban on handgun sales in department stores, discount stores, and pharmacies.

A Voting Issue. By more than 2 to 1 (35% to 17%), Fresno-area voters would be more likely to support a candidate for governor who supports stricter handgun control over one who opposes stricter handgun control.

(The California Wellness Foundation survey by EDK Associates. Conducted July 28-29, 1994, among 300 registered voters in the Fresno area. The margin of error is +/- 6 percentage points.)

California: The Field Poll

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"How effective do you think stronger laws restricting the sale and possession of guns would be in reducing the amount of violent crime in your community — very effective, somewhat effective, not too effective, or not at all effective?"

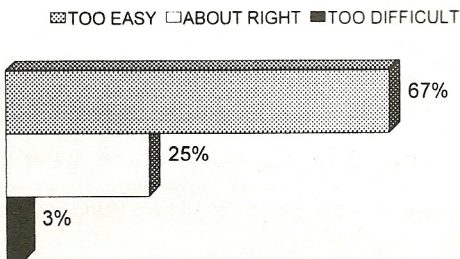
	%
Very effective	24
Somewhat effective	30
Not too effective	17
Not at all effective	23
No opinion	6

"Generally speaking, do you think that existing laws make it too easy for people to buy guns, too difficult, or are they about right?"

	Too Easy %	About Right %	Too Difficult %	No Opinion %
Statewide	67	25	3	5
Gun owners	49	39	4	8
Non-owners	76	18	3	3
Male	58	31	4	7
Female	76	18	2	4
18-29 years old	53	40	4	3
30-49 years old	72	20	4	4
50 and older	72	18	2	8

Gun Laws

Is it too easy to buy a gun?



"Would you approve or disapprove of a law which would prohibit the sale of guns through the mails?"

	%
Approve	60
Disapprove	37
No opinion	3

"Would you approve or disapprove of a law which would require every citizen who owns or buys a gun to register the gun with law enforcement agencies?"

	Approve %	Disapprove %	No Opinion %
Statewide	86	13	1
Gun owners	76	23	1
Non-owners	91	8	1
Male	78	20	2
Female	93	6	1

"Would you approve or disapprove of a law which would license people to have handguns, such as pistols or revolvers, only if they can show a definite need for them?"

	Approve %	Disapprove %	No Opinion %
Statewide	56	35	9
Gun owners	41	52	7
Non-owners	63	27	10
Male	53	41	6
Female	59	29	12

"Would you approve or disapprove of changing California's gun laws to make it easier for a person to obtain a permit to buy a gun?"

	%
Approve	12
Disapprove	82
No opinion	6

"Would you approve or disapprove of changing California's gun laws to make it easier for a person who had a permit to openly carry a gun in public so that it can be seen by other people?"

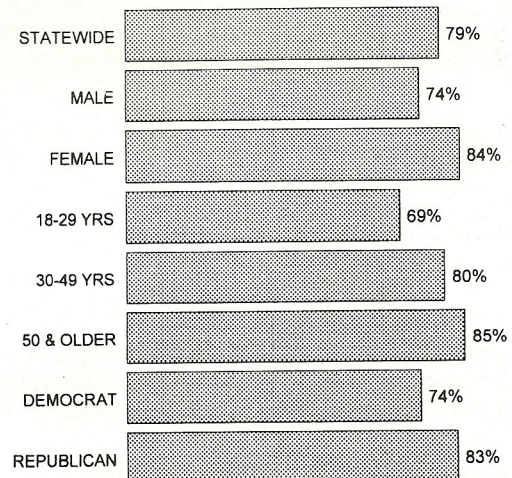
	%
Approve	22
Disapprove	71
No opinion	7

The Field Poll. Conducted July 12-17, 1994, among 847 California adults. The margin of error is +/- 5 percentage points.

"Next, I am going to read a number of things that are of concern to people in California today. For each of these things, I would like you to tell me whether you are extremely concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned about this issue. Crime and law enforcement." (Question asked of 1/2 the sample.)

Concern About Crime

Californians who are extremely concerned about crime and law enforcement



National Polling on Handguns and Violence

U.S. News & World Report Poll taken by Republican pollster Ed Goetas of The Tarrance Group, and Democratic pollster Celinda Lake of Mellman Lazarus Lake. Conducted May 16-18, 1994, among 1,000 adults. The margin of error is +/- 3.1 percentage points.

"How serious a problem do you think the use of guns is in your neighborhood — very serious, somewhat serious, not very serious or not serious at all?"

	%
Very serious	16
Somewhat serious	19
Not very serious	29
Not serious at all	33
Not sure	4

"How serious a problem do you think the existence of guns is in the schools where you live — very serious, somewhat serious, not very serious or not serious at all?"

	%
Very serious	25
Somewhat serious	22
Not very serious	24
Not serious at all	21
Not sure	8

"Have you ever heard gunshots in your neighborhood?"

	%
Yes, heard gunshots	37
No	62
Not sure	1

"...please tell me if you agree or disagree... In communities where more of the average citizens own guns, there is less crime."

	%
Agree	30
Disagree	55
No difference (vol.)	2
Unsure	14

"Do you know anyone who has been the victim of an unintended use of a gun — specifically, a child being hurt with a household gun, a suicide, or an attacker using someone's gun against them?"

	%
Yes — a suicide	11
Yes — a child hurt	8
Yes — attacker using someone's gun against them	5
Yes — other victim	5
No	72

The Gallup Poll. Conducted December 17-21, 1993, among 1,014 adults (plus an oversample of 750 gun households). The margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points (+/- 4 percentage points for gun owners).

"In general, do you feel that the laws covering the sale of firearms should be made more strict, less strict, or kept as they are now?"

	TOTAL %	GUN OWNERS %
Made more strict	67	47
Made less strict	7	10
Kept as they are now	25	42
No opinion	1	1

"In general, do you feel that the laws covering the sale of handguns should be made more strict, less strict, or kept as they are now?"

	TOTAL %	GUN OWNERS %
Made more strict	72	55
Made less strict	5	8
Kept as they are now	22	36
No opinion	1	1

"Do you think there should or should not be a law that would ban the possession of handguns, except by the police and other authorized persons?"

	TOTAL %	GUN OWNERS %
Should be a ban	39	16
Should not be	60	83
No opinion	1	1

"Would you favor or oppose the registration of all handguns?"

	TOTAL %	GUN OWNERS %
Favor registration	81	71
Oppose	18	28
No opinion	1	1

"In your view, is the problem of gun violence in the U.S. better today than it has been in recent years, is it worse, or is the problem about the same?"

	TOTAL %	GUN OWNERS %
Gun violence is better	1	1
Gun violence is worse	85	77
About the same	14	21
No opinion	-	1

"Please tell me whether you would generally favor or oppose each of the following proposals which some people have made to reduce the amount of gun violence.

"Requiring people to take safety classes in order to qualify to own a gun.

"Prohibiting people under the age of 18 from being able to purchase a gun.

"Prohibiting people with criminal histories from being able to purchase or own guns.

"A ban on the manufacture, sale, and possession of semi-automatic assault guns, such as the AK-47.

"A ban on the manufacture and sale of cheap handguns.

"A limit on gun purchases to one per month.

"A very high federal sales tax which would increase the price of bullets for most handguns by 50%."

Percent who favor:

	TOTAL %	GUN OWNERS %
Require safety classes	89	82
Prohibit sale to minors	88	84
Prohibit sale to people with criminal histories	87	87
Ban on assault guns	77	66
Ban on cheap handguns	72	60
Limit purchases to one per month	69	59
Sales tax on bullets	55	30

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National Polls

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The Times Mirror Center for the People & the Press Poll taken by Princeton Survey Research Associates. Conducted December 2-5, 1993, among 1,479 adults. The margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points.

"What do you think is more important: to protect the right of Americans to own guns, or, to control gunownership?"

	%
Control gun ownership	57
Protect right to own guns	34
Not sure	9

The ABC News Poll. Conducted November 5-7, 1993, among 509 adults. The margin of error is +/- 5 percentage points.

"Do you favor or oppose stronger legislation controlling the distribution of handguns in the United States?"

	%
Favor stronger handgun legislation	67
Oppose	30
No opinion	3

"Do you think stronger legislation controlling the distribution of handguns in the United States would reduce the amount of crime and violence in the country or not?"

	%
Yes, would reduce crime	58
No	39
No opinion	3

"Do you favor or oppose stronger legislation controlling the distribution of assault weapons in the United States?"

	%
Favor stronger assault weapon legislation	79
Oppose	18
No opinion	3

"Do you favor or oppose legislation that would put a heavy tax on bullets to discourage people from buying ammunition?"

	%
Favor heavy tax on bullets	57
Oppose	40
No opinion	3

Harvard School of Public Health survey taken by LH Research, with a grant from the Joyce Foundation. Conducted in April 1993, among 1,250 adults. The margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points.

"There has been a lot of talk lately about some serious problems that affect children and teenagers. Some people believe that some of these problems are really increasing while others believe we just hear more about them now. Compared to when you were a child, do you believe that (SEE ITEMS BELOW) has increased, decreased, or remained about the same?"

	Increased %	Decreased %	Remained the Same %	Not Sure %
Teenagers being killed by guns	93	1	5	1
Children shooting other children	92	1	5	2
Drug and alcohol abuse	84	3	12	1
Suicide among young people	76	2	17	5
Sexual assault of children	76	1	19	4
Injury or death from drunk driving	74	8	17	1
Physical abuse by parents	56	6	32	6

"Compared to when you were growing up, would you say that there is now more violence (SEE ITEMS BELOW) than there was then, less violence, or about the same as it was then?"

	More %	Less %	About the Same %	Not Sure %
In the streets of our cities	94	0	5	1
In the schools	91	1	7	1
In the home	61	4	31	4
In the workplace	45	7	41	7

"How much do you feel that the availability of guns and the increase in the number of guns that are sold and bought have contributed to the violence — a great deal, somewhat, not much, or not at all?"

	%
A great deal	61
Somewhat	20
Not much	10
Not at all	7
Not sure	2

PREVENT HANDGUN VIOLENCE AGAINST KIDS

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