

Topic: Gun ownership and regulation

Background

The right to bear arms is guaranteed in the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. But the government plays an important role in regulating the sale and use of guns.

The public is closely divided over whether it's more important to *protect the rights of Americans to own guns* or to *control gun ownership*.

Still, a majority of Americans (58%) say gun laws in the United States should be more strict. Only 15% say they should be less strict, and 26% say the current laws are about right.

Public opinion polling says ...

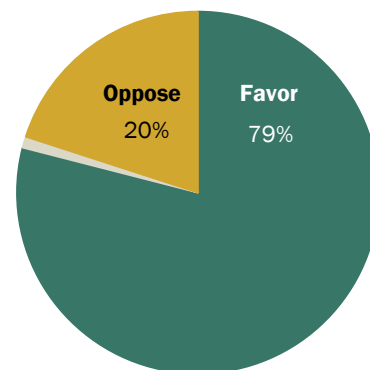
Pew Research Center conducted a survey of U.S. adults in June 2023. It included a number of questions about gun ownership and gun regulation.

When Americans were asked whether they would favor or oppose increasing the minimum age for buying a gun to 21, here's what they said:

- **79%** favor this proposal, with 59% saying they strongly favor it and 20% saying they favor it somewhat.
- **20%** oppose this proposal, including 10% who strongly oppose it and 10% who oppose it somewhat.

Views on raising the minimum age for gun purchases

% saying they favor/oppose increasing the minimum age for buying guns to 21



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer is shown but not labeled.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.

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How views differ by partisanship

Public views on whether and how gun ownership should be regulated vary widely by party identification.

Even so, majorities of both Democrats and Republicans favor increasing the minimum age for buying a gun to 21.

- **69%** of Republicans and independents who lean to the Republican Party favor this.
- **90%** of Democrats and independents who lean Democratic favor it.

How does the public feel about other proposals to restrict gun ownership?

The survey asked about a few other gun policy proposals. It found majorities favor each one.

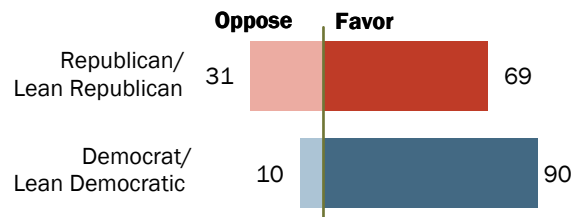
For example, 88% of adults favor preventing people with mental illnesses from purchasing guns.

What does polling say about related topics?

- About half of Americans (49%) say gun violence is a major problem in this country.
- The public is divided over whether gun ownership does more to *increase safety by allowing law-abiding citizens to protect themselves* (52% say this) or more to *reduce safety by giving too many people access to guns and increasing misuse* (47%).

How Republicans and Democrats view raising the minimum age for gun purchases

% saying they favor/oppose increasing the minimum age for buying guns to 21



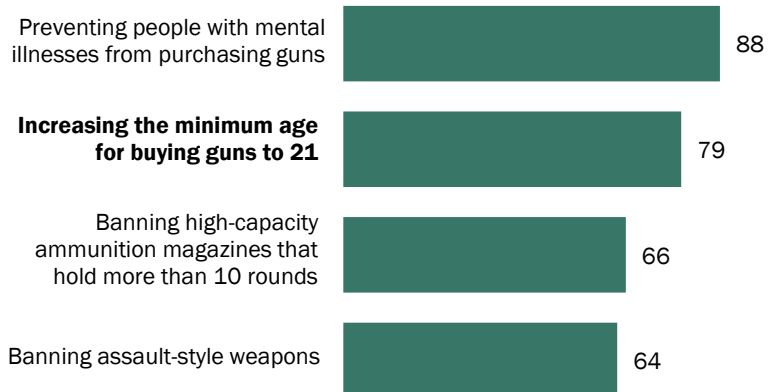
Note: Shares of respondents who didn't offer an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.

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Views on policies that would restrict gun ownership

% saying they strongly or somewhat **favor** each of the following



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.

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- Among gun owners, the top reason they give for owning a gun is for protection (72% say this is a major reason they own a gun). And 81% of gun owners say they feel safer in their home because they own a gun.

Discussion questions

- Did anything about this data surprise you?
- Why do you think it's been so difficult for Congress to pass gun legislation when there's a fair bit of agreement among the public on some key proposals?
- Do these findings reflect the way you think people in your community feel?

Additional resources

Use this QR code to view a web version of this brief and to visit the publications below:



[Summary of key facts about Americans and guns](#)

A detailed analysis of Pew Research Center's 2023 survey on [views about gun policy](#), and [views on gun ownership](#)

A deeper dive on [the culture of guns in the U.S.](#)