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#### Key facts about Americans and guns

#### **BY KATHERINE SCHAEFFER**



A customer shops for a handgun at a gun store in Florida. (Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

Guns are deeply ingrained in American society and the nation's political debates.

The Second Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees the right to bear arms, and about a third of U.S. adults say they personally own a gun. At the same time, in response to concerns such as <u>rising gun death rates</u> and <u>mass shootings</u>, President Joe Biden has <u>proposed gun policy legislation</u> that would expand on the bipartisan gun safety bill Congress passed last year.

Here are some key findings about Americans' views of gun ownership, gun policy and other subjects, drawn primarily from a <u>Pew Research Center survey conducted in June 2023</u>.

How we did this  $\oplus$ 

<strong>Measuring gun ownership </strong> (+)

About four-in-ten U.S. adults say they live in a household with a gun, including 32% who say they personally own one, according to an August report based on our June survey. These numbers are virtually unchanged since the last time we asked this question in 2021.

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There are differences in gun ownership rates by political affiliation, gender, community type and other factors.

- Republicans and Republican-leaning independents are more than twice as likely as
   Democrats and Democratic leaners to say they personally own a gun (45% vs. 20%).
- 40% of men say they own a gun, compared with 25% of women.
- 47% of adults living in rural areas report personally owning a firearm, as do smaller shares of those who live in suburbs (30%) or urban areas (20%).
- 38% of White Americans own a gun, compared with smaller shares of Black (24%),
   Hispanic (20%) and Asian (10%) Americans.

| Nearly a third of U.S. adults say they personally own a gun   |  |                            |
|---|--|----------------------------|
| % who say they  |  |                            |
| ■ Personally<br>own a gun   | Don't own a gun but<br>someone else in their<br>household does | NET<br>Gun in<br>household |
| All adults  | 32 10  | 42                         |
| Men   | 40 5   | 45                         |
| Women   | 25 15  | 40                         |
| White   | 38 11  | 49                         |
| Black   | 24 10  | 34                         |
| Hispanic  | 20 8   | 28                         |
| Asian*  | 10 8   | 18                         |
| Ages 18-29  | 21 12  | 33                         |
| 30-49   | 33 10  | 42                         |
| 50-64   | 37 9   | 46                         |
| 65+   | 35 11  | 46                         |
| Postgrad  | 23 10  | 33                         |
| College grad  | 30 10  | 40                         |
| Some college  | 36 11  | 47                         |
| HS or less  | 33 10  | 43                         |
| Urban   | 20 7   | 28                         |
| Suburban  | 30 11  | 41                         |
| Rural   | 47 11  | 59                         |
| Rep/Lean Rep  | 45 10  | 55                         |
| Conserv   | 51 8   | 59                         |
| Mod/Lib   | 38 13  | 51                         |
| Dem/Lean Dem  | 20 10  | 31                         |
| Cons/Mod  | 24 10  | 34                         |
| Liberal   | 16 11  | 27                         |
| * Estimates for Asian adults are representative of English speakers only.  Note: White, Black and Asian adults include only those who report being one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanic adults are of any race.  Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.  PEW RESEARCH CENTER |  |                            |

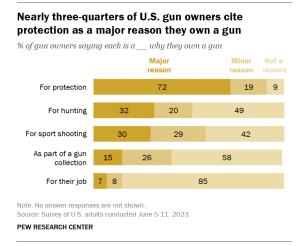
#### Personal protection tops the list of reasons gun owners give for

**owning a firearm.** About three-quarters (72%) of gun owners say that protection is a major reason they own a gun. Considerably smaller shares say that a major reason they own a gun is for hunting (32%), for sport shooting (30%), as part of a gun collection (15%) or for their job (7%).

The reasons behind gun ownership have changed only modestly since our <u>2017 survey</u> of attitudes toward gun ownership and gun policies. At that time, 67% of gun owners cited protection as a major reason they owned a firearm.

current world leaders?

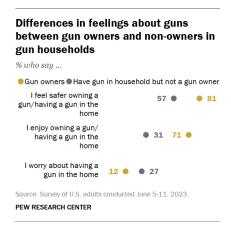
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# Gun owners tend to have much more positive feelings about having a gun in the house than non-owners who live with them. For instance, 71%

of gun owners say they enjoy owning a gun – but far fewer non-gun owners in gun-owning households (31%) say they enjoy having one in the home. And while 81% of gun owners say owning a gun makes them feel safer, a narrower majority (57%) of non-owners in gun households say the same about having a firearm at home. Non-owners are also more likely than owners to worry about having a gun in the home (27% vs. 12%, respectively).

Feelings about gun ownership also differ by political affiliation, even among those who personally own firearms. Republican gun owners are more likely than Democratic owners to say owning a gun gives them feelings of safety and enjoyment, while Democratic owners are more likely to say they worry about having a gun in the home.



# Non-gun owners are split on whether they see themselves owning a firearm in the future. About half (52%) of Americans who don't own a gun say they could never see themselves owning one, while nearly as many (47%) could imagine themselves as gun owners in the future.

Among those who currently do not own a gun:

- 56% of men say they could see themselves owning a gun one day; 40% of women say the same.
- 61% of Republicans and 40% of Democrats who don't own a gun say they would consider owning one in the future.
- 56% of Black non-owners say they could see themselves owning a gun one day, compared with smaller shares of White (48%), Hispanic (40%) and Asian (38%) non-owners.

# Americans are evenly split over whether gun ownership does more to increase or decrease safety.

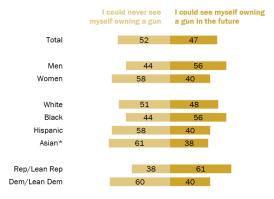
About half (49%) say it does more to increase safety by allowing law-abiding citizens to protect themselves, but an equal share say gun ownership does more to reduce safety by giving too many people access to firearms and increasing misuse.

Republicans and Democrats differ on this question: 79% of Republicans say that gun ownership does more to *increase* safety, while a nearly identical share of Democrats (78%) say that it does more to *reduce* safety.

Urban and rural
Americans also have
starkly different views.
Among adults who live in
urban areas, 64% say gun
ownership *reduces* safety,
while 34% say it does
more to increase safety.
Among those who live in
rural areas, 65% say gun
ownership *increases* 

#### Non-gun owners are divided on whether they could see themselves owning a gun in the future

% of non-gun owners who say ...

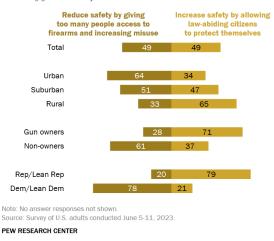


\* Estimates for Asian adults are representative of English speakers only. Notes: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. No answer responses are not shown. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.

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#### Stark differences in views on whether gun ownership does more to increase or decrease safety in the U.S.

% who say gun ownership does more to ...



safety, compared with 33% who say it does more to reduce safety. Those living in the suburbs are about evenly split.

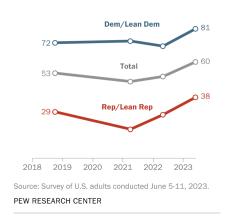
### Americans increasingly say that gun violence is a major problem. Sixin-ten U.S. adults say gun violence is a very big problem in the country today, up 9

percentage points from spring 2022. In the survey conducted this June, 23% say gun violence is a moderately big problem, and about two-in-ten say it is either a small problem (13%) or not a problem at all (4%).

Looking ahead, 62% of Americans say they expect the level of gun violence to increase over the next five years. This is double the share who expect it to stay the same (31%). Just 7% expect the level of gun violence to decrease.

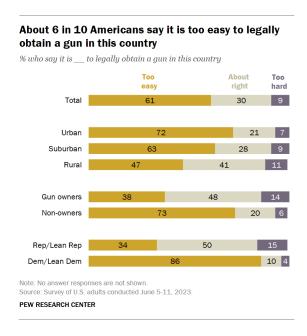
#### Growing share of Americans say gun violence is a 'very big' national problem

% who say gun violence is a **very big problem** 

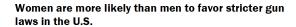


A majority of Americans (61%) say it is too easy to legally obtain a gun in this country. Another 30% say the ease of legally obtaining a gun is about right, and 9% say it is too hard to get a gun. Non-gun owners are nearly twice as likely as gun owners to say it is too easy to legally obtain a gun (73% vs. 38%). Meanwhile, gun owners are more than twice as likely as non-owners to say the ease of obtaining a gun is about right (48% vs. 20%).

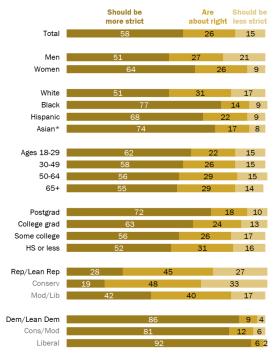
Partisan and demographic differences also exist on this question. While 86% of Democrats say it is too easy to obtain a gun legally, 34% of Republicans say the same. Most urban (72%) and suburban (63%) dwellers say it's too easy to legally obtain a gun. Rural residents are more divided: 47% say it is too easy, 41% say it is about right and 11% say it is too hard.



About six-in-ten U.S. adults (58%) favor stricter gun laws. Another 26% say that U.S. gun laws are about right, and 15% favor less strict gun laws. The percentage who say these laws should be stricter has fluctuated a bit in recent years. In 2021, 53% favored stricter gun laws, and in 2019, 60% said laws should be stricter.







<sup>\*</sup> Estimates for Asian adults are representative of English speakers only.

Note: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. No answer responses not shown.

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

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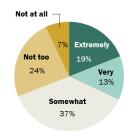
## About a third (32%) of parents with K-12 students say they are very or extremely worried about a shooting ever happening at their children's

**school,** according to a <u>fall 2022 Center survey</u> of parents with at least one child younger than 18. A similar share of K-12 parents (31%) say they are not too or not at all worried about a shooting ever happening at their children's school, while 37% of parents say they are somewhat worried.

Among all parents with children under 18, including those who are not in school, 63% see improving mental health screening and treatment as a very or extremely effective way to prevent school shootings. This is larger than the shares who say the same about having police officers or armed security in schools (49%), banning assault-style weapons (45%), or having metal detectors in schools (41%). Just 24% of parents say allowing teachers and school administrators to carry guns in school would be a very or extremely effective approach, while half say this would be not too or not at all effective.

#### 19% of K-12 parents are extremely worried about a shooting happening at their children's school

% of parents of K-12 students saying they are \_\_\_\_ worried about the possibility of a shooting ever happening at their children's school



Note: Based on parents whose children are not homeschooled and who answered the question.

Source: Survey of U.S. parents conducted Sept. 20-Oct. 2, 2022.

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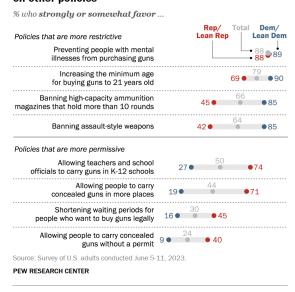
# There is broad partisan agreement on some gun policy proposals, but most are politically divisive, the June 2023 survey found. Majorities

of U.S. adults in both partisan coalitions somewhat or strongly favor two policies that would restrict gun access: preventing those with mental illnesses from purchasing guns (88% of Republicans and 89% of Democrats support this) and increasing the minimum age for buying guns to 21 years old (69% of Republicans, 90% of Democrats). Majorities in both parties also *oppose* allowing people to carry concealed firearms without a permit (60% of Republicans and 91% of Democrats oppose this).

Republicans and Democrats differ on several other proposals. While 85% of Democrats favor banning both assault-style weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines that hold more than 10 rounds, majorities of Republicans *oppose* these proposals (57% and 54%, respectively).

Most Republicans, on the other hand, support allowing teachers and school officials to carry guns in K-12 schools (74%) and allowing people to carry concealed guns in more places (71%). These

# Bipartisan support for preventing people with mental illnesses from purchasing guns, but wide differences on other policies



proposals are supported by just 27% and 19% of Democrats, respectively.

**Gun ownership is linked with views on gun policies.** Americans who own guns are less likely than non-owners to favor restrictions on gun ownership, with a notable exception. Nearly identical majorities of gun owners (87%) and non-owners (89%) favor preventing mentally ill people from buying guns.

Within both parties, differences between gun owners and non-owners are evident – but they are especially stark among Republicans. For example,

#### Within each party, gun owners are more likely than non-owners to favor expanded access to guns

% who strongly or somewhat favor ...

AMONG REP/LEAN REP

• Gun owner • Non-owner

AMONG DEM/LEAN DEM

Gun owner O Non-owner

Policies that are more restrictive

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