

The Star-Ledger/**Eagleton-Rutgers Poll**

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in the Sunday, October 3 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to “*The Star-Ledger/ Eagleton Poll.*”

RELEASE: (EP123-3)

NEW JERSEY UNDER THE GUN: PUBLIC WORRIED ABOUT GUN VIOLENCE; ENDORSE STRICT GUN CONTROL & SAFETY MEASURES

New Jerseyans are clearly worried about the amount of gun violence in American society. Most see the recent episodes in Colorado, Georgia, California and Texas not as isolated incidents, but as symptomatic of an increasingly violent culture. One-in-four state residents say that someone close to them, such as a friend or relative, has been shot by a gun.

A large number blame the media—both entertainment and news, television and movies—for overemphasizing violence and contributing to this culture. A substantial number also believe that the National Rifle Association exerts too much influence over gun policy in the country.

Most Garden State residents believe the Second Amendment, which guarantees the right to bear arms, should take a backseat to greater gun control. While the majority stops just short of endorsing a ban on all handguns, there is a virtual consensus that stricter gun laws are necessary. Almost all favor universal registration of guns, raising the minimum age of handgun possession to 21, mandatory gun safety courses, requiring new guns to be sold with trigger locks and the development of smart guns within five

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics

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years.

When compared to the U.S. as a whole, New Jerseyans are more likely to favor gun restrictions. Within New Jersey, women are more likely than men to be concerned about gun violence and favor tougher gun control laws.

These are some of the findings of the most recent Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll, conducted by telephone between September 15 and 22 with a random sample of 802 New Jersey adults. The poll has a sampling error of ± 3.5 percentage points.

Gun violence appears to be a major concern to a significant number of New Jersey residents. Fully three-fifths say they worry “a lot” about gun violence in the country, typified by the shootings in a Littleton, Colorado school and most recently in a Texas church. This figure includes 50 percent of men and almost 70 percent of women. Moreover, one-fifth of all New Jerseyans believe it to be “very likely” that such a shooting incident could happen in their own community. Another third feel it is at least “somewhat likely” that this type of incident could happen in their locality. A far greater number of racial and ethnic minorities believe it is very likely that gun violence could touch their communities.

New Jersey residents clearly do not hold the Second Amendment sacred; in fact, support for it is slipping. By a majority of 57 to 41 percent, more New Jersey residents disagree than agree with the statement, “Owning a gun is a right all Americans should have.” Eight years ago equal numbers agreed and disagreed with this statement. And when asked which is more important—to protect the rights of Americans to own guns, or to control gun ownership—just 21 percent put the Second Amendment first. Almost three-quarters feel gun control is the more important consideration.

The majority of New Jersey residents are not ready for a total ban on handguns in the state, but it's close—46 percent favor a law banning the sale and possession of handguns while 51 percent oppose such a law and the remaining few offer no opinion. But there is a widespread call for stricter gun control that is louder in New Jersey than in the rest of the country. The current poll finds 81 percent saying that gun control laws should be stricter than they are now. A poll conducted by the Gallup organization in August asking the same question of a national sample found 65 percent expressing that same sentiment.

The Rutgers-based survey asked its statewide sample about eight measures to increase gun safety or restrict firearms, and large majorities—over 90 percent for some items—approved every one of them.

- 96 percent say purchasers of all guns should be subject to a background check prior to owning a gun.
- 91 percent favor the registration of all firearms.
- 89 percent want safety locks or trigger guards required with the sale of new handguns.
- 89 percent believe all handgun owners should be required to attend a course on gun safety.
- 87 percent believe the minimum age for handgun possession should be raised to 21.
- 80 percent favor a law requiring that all guns sold in New Jersey have a passive safety system within 5 years. Guns would not be able to fire except for authorized users.
- 69 percent believe parents should be held legally responsible if their children commit crimes with their parents' guns.

- 68 percent favor a prohibition on gun shows, where people often buy and sell guns without much regulation.

Cliff Zukin, director of the poll, commented, “We find people genuinely worried and hungry for any scrap that hints at a safer society. Our respondents ravenously ate up every idea we tested on gun restriction, without much in the way of concern for individual rights that might have to be given up in exchange.”

The only finding in the poll that might comfort anti-gun control advocates is that 69 percent agreed with the statement “Strict gun control laws make it more difficult for law abiding citizens to get guns, but not more difficult for criminals to get them.” Just 27 percent disagreed with this sentiment. However, 56 percent also agreed that “Stricter gun control laws would reduce the amount of violence in society.”

The survey finds that many people fault television and movies for being a “carrier” of violence and thereby infecting society. Most—65 percent—feel that there is too much violence portrayed on entertainment television today. Just over 40 percent say violence on TV shows is “very harmful” to society; an equal number believe that violence on TV and in movies is a “major cause” of violence in society.

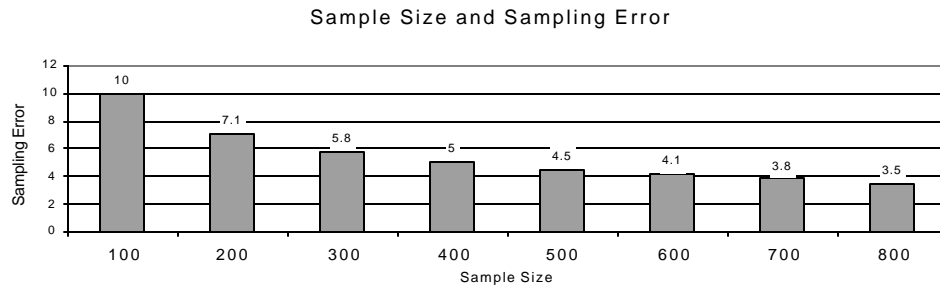
A similarly high 58 percent believe that television *news* gives too much attention to stories about violent crime, with 40 percent saying TV portrays more violence than really occurs. Just 13 percent feel TV shows less violence than actually happens and 42 percent say TV news gives an accurate portrayal. And by a lopsided margin of 70 to 20 percent, far more think TV covers violence to get ratings rather than because it is genuine news that people need to know.

Nineteen percent of those New Jerseyans interviewed say they have some kind of gun in their house—the survey estimates that three percent of all New Jersey households have a loaded gun in them. One-quarter say someone close to them has been shot by a gun, not including military combat.

Finally, the survey finds a sense that people feel the National Rifle Association exercises too much clout on behalf of gun owners: 47 percent say the NRA has “too much” influence over gun policy in the country, compared to 15 percent who say it has “too little” influence and 26 percent who say it has the “right amount.” The remaining 12 percent express no opinion.

BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE (EP123-3) SUNDAY OCTOBER 3, 1999

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll was conducted between September 15 and 22 with a scientifically selected random sample of 802 New Jersey adult residents interviewed by telephone. All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error for the total sample size of 800 is ± 3.5 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jerseyans were found to have a favorable opinion of the Governor, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.5 .and 53.5 percent (50 ± 3.5) had all New Jerseyans been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported for men and women, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error. The sampling error for the racial grouping reported in this release is as follows:



Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects. The verbatim wording of all questions asked is reproduced in this background memo. The sample has been stratified based on county and the data have been weighted on age and education to insure an accurate proportional representation of the state. The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

There have been a few shooting incidents in the news lately—like the ones in a Colorado school, a Jewish Center in California and an Atlanta suburb. How personally concerned are you about the amount of gun violence in American society. Is this something that you worry about a lot, some, just a little, or not at all? (GV1)

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Just a Little</u>	<u>Not at All</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	60%	24%	11%	5%	100%	(802)
By Gender						
--Male	50	27	15	8	100	(390)
--Female	69	21	6	3	99	(412)

Thinking back over the last 5 years or so, do you think the United States has become a more violent place in general, or are there simply more highly visible events of gun violence? (GV2)

	<u>More violent place</u>	<u>More incidents</u>	<u>Other (VOL)</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	51%	42%	3%	4%	100%	(802)
By Gender						
--Male	43	49	4	4	100	(390)
--Female	58	36	3	3	100	(412)

From what you know about you own local community, how likely is it that a shooting incident could happen there. Is it very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely or not at all likely? (GV3)

	<u>Very likely</u>	<u>Somewhat likely</u>	<u>Not too likely</u>	<u>Not at all likely</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	19%	34%	34%	10%	4%	101%	(802)
By Race							
--White	14	37	34	11	4	100	(593)
--Non-White	33	24	31	9	3	100	(193)
<i>Newsweek August 1999</i>	24	38	25	9	4	101	

Which do you think is more important—to protect the right of Americans to own guns, or to control gun ownership? (GV4)

	<u>Protect rights of Americans</u>	<u>Control gun ownership</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	21%	73%	6%	100%	(802)
<i>Pew Research Center-June 1999</i>	33	62	5	100	(1153)

In general, do you think the laws covering the sale of firearms should be made more strict, less strict, or kept as they are now? (GV5A)

	<u>More strict</u>	<u>Less strict</u>	<u>Kept as now</u>	<u>Don't know what laws are now</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	81%	2%	15%	1%	--%	100%	(397)
<i>Gallup-August 1999</i>	65	5	28	2	--	100	(1048)

Please tell me whether you generally favor or oppose each of the following proposals which some people have made to reduce the amount of violence. (RANDOMIZE STATEMENTS 1 THROUGH 5 How about...

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Raise the minimum age of hand gun possession to 21 years					
September, 1999	87%	12%	1%	100%	(397)
<i>Gallup June 1999</i>	82	17	1	100	(1016)

Continued

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Hold parents legally responsible if their children commit crimes with their parents' guns September, 1999	69	26	6	100	(397)
<i>Gallup June 1999</i>	57	39	4	100	(1016)
Require safety locks or trigger guards to be included with all new hand guns purchased September, 1999	89	9	2	100	(397)
<i>Gallup June 1999</i>	85	14	1	100	(1016)
Require the registration of all firearms September, 1999	91	8	1	100	(397)
<i>Gallup June 1999</i>	79	20	1	100	(1016)
A law banning the sale and possession of handguns in New Jersey September, 1999	46	51	4	101	(802)
<i>Eagleton Poll 1981</i>	59	33	8	100	(1003)

What is your personal view on the issue of gun control in New Jersey. Do you think that the laws on gun ownership should be more strict than they are now, less strict, are they about right, or don't you know anything about the current gun laws?

	<u>More strict</u>	<u>Less strict</u>	<u>Kept as now</u>	<u>Don't know what laws are now</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	58%	4%	17%	20%	1%	100%	(405)
<i>NJ Star Ledger Eagleton Poll July 1991</i>	58	8	17	13	3	99	(800)

Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Owning a gun is a right all Americans should have					
September, 1999	41%	57%	2%	100%	(405)
<i>NJ Star Ledger Eagleton Poll July 1991</i>	47	49	5	101	(800)
Strict gun control laws make it more difficult for law abiding citizens to get guns, but not more difficult for criminals to get them					
September, 1999	69	27	4	100	(405)
<i>NJ Star Ledger Eagleton Poll July 1991</i>	66	28	6	100	(800)
Stricter gun control laws would reduce the amount of violence in society					
September, 1999	56	41	3	100	(405)
The media's coverage of shooting incidents make people feel more endangered than they really are					
September, 1999	65	32	2	100	(405)

Please tell me whether you generally favor or oppose each of the following proposals which some people have made to reduce the amount of gun violence. (RANDOMIZE STATEMENTS 1 THROUGH 5) How about... (GV7B)

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Make purchasers of all guns be subject to background checks before they can own a gun					
September, 1999	96%	3%	1%	100%	(405)
Require all handgun owners to attend a course on gun safety					
September, 1999	89	9	2	100	(405)
Prohibit gun shows where people often buy and sell guns without much regulation					
September, 1999	68	29	4	101	(405)
Pass a state law requiring all guns sold in New Jersey have a passive safety system within 5 years. This is where guns can not fire unless they read the fingerprints of the owner or the right code is put in.					
September, 1999	80	18	2	100	(405)

Do you have any kind of gun in your home? IF YES, PROBE: Are any of them loaded? (GV8)

	<u>Yes, loaded</u>	<u>Yes, not loaded</u>	<u>No gun</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	3%	16%	79%	2%	99%	(802)

Not including military combat, has anyone close to you—such as a friend or relative—ever been shot by a gun, or not? (GV9)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	25%	75%	100%	(802)

Do you think the National Rifle Association, also known as the NRA, has too much influence over gun policy in this country, not enough influence, or the right amount of influence? (GV10)

	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Not Enough</u>	<u>Right Amount</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	47%	15%	26%	12%	100%	(802)

Generally speaking, would you say that violence on TV shows is harmFUL to society, or harmLESS to society? If HARMFUL, PROBE: Is that very harmful or only somewhat harmful? (GV11A)

	<u>Very Harmful</u>	<u>Somewhat Harmful</u>	<u>Harmless</u>	<u>Depends (VOL)</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	43%	31%	21%	2%	3%	100%	(397)

Do you feel that violence on TV and in movies is a major cause of violence in society, a minor cause, or hardly a cause at all? (GV12)

	<u>Major Cause</u>	<u>Minor Cause</u>	<u>Hardly a Cause at all/Not a Cause</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	42%	39%	18%	1%	100%	(802)

How do you feel about the amount of violence portrayed on television programs today, not including news programs? Do you think there is too much violence, a reasonable amount, or very little violence? (GV13)

	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Reasonable Amount</u>	<u>Very Little</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	65%	31%	2%	2%	100%	(802)

Now turning your attention to the news...Do you think television news gives too much attention to stories about violent crimes, not enough attention, or about the right amount? (GV14)

	<u>Too Much</u>	<u>Not Enough</u>	<u>Right Amount</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	58%	3%	36%	2%	100%	(802)

How much violence is there on television news compared to real life? Do you think television portrays more violence than actually occurs, less violence than occurs, or does TV new present an accurate portrayal of how much violence there really is? (GV 15B)

	<u>More</u>	<u>Less</u>	<u>Accurate</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	40%	13%	42%	5%	100%	(397)

Do you think that TV news covers violence because it is genuine news that people need to know, or do they do it in order to get ratings and viewers? (GV 16)

	<u>Genuine News</u>	<u>To Get Ratings</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1999	20%	70%	8%	3%	100%	(802)