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Majority of Illinois Voters Support Stricter Gun Laws

In the wake of gun violence in Chicago and the mass killing of first-graders in Newtown, Connecticut, a new statewide survey of Illinois voters shows most of them favor stricter gun control laws and policies.

The poll, taken by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University, shows stronger support for these measures than national surveys show among Americans as a whole.

About twice as many Illinois voters surveyed thought controlling gun ownership was more important than protecting the right to own guns (59.5 percent to 31.3 percent). A recent poll of all Americans taken by Pew Research, shows a 49 to 42 percent split on that question.

Also, more than seven in ten Illinoisans thought laws covering the sale of firearms should be made more strict (72.3 percent). Only two voters out of a hundred (2.2 percent) thought laws concerning gun sales should be made less strict, and the remainder (21.3 percent) thought gun-sales laws should be kept the same. Nationally, the Gallup poll shows 58 percent support stricter laws, 6 percent were for fewer restrictions and 34 percent said they should be kept the same.

“It’s hard to say whether the recent, high-profile shootings in Sandy Hook and Aurora, and the spike in gun violence in Chicago, may be swaying some voters in typically anti-gun-control constituencies,” said Charles Leonard, the Simon Institute visiting professor who supervised the poll. “While most support ‘stricter gun control’ in the abstract, it is often harder to reach agreement on specific policies—particularly given the fierce opposition by gun rights groups and their allies.”

The Simon poll conducted live-interview telephone interviews of 600 registered voters across Illinois and has a margin for error of plus or minus four percentage points. One-third of the interviews were conducted via cell phone.

Even within constituencies that are seen as pro-gun, majorities in the Simon Poll said they favored stricter gun control. These groups included downstate voters (66.1%) conservatives (54.6%) and Republicans (55.4%).

Significant majorities also favored most of the specific gun-control policy proposals tested in the poll, including requiring background checks before anyone—including gun dealers—could buy firearms at gun shows (92.5 percent); banning high-capacity ammunition magazines (62.8 percent); and banning semi-automatic “assault rifles” (58.7 percent).

“It’s striking how much stronger the support for gun control measures is in Illinois compared to the nation as a whole,” said David Yepsen, the director of the Institute. “But it’s not surprising because on measurements of many social issues, the electorate in Illinois is more left of center than the American electorate.”

However, by almost two-to-one (61.3 percent to 32.7 percent), voters in the Simon Poll opposed a ban on possession of handguns, with exceptions for police officers or other authorized persons.

Most poll respondents who expressed an opinion on the matter did not believe that the Second Amendment includes the right to carry concealed weapons in public (49.7 percent vs. 39.5 percent, with 10.8 percent undecided). Among those who thought the Second Amendment did cover concealed weapons, a large majority (71.3 percent) thought there should be exceptions to concealed-carry in places such as schools, college campuses, malls, and theaters.

Respondents were evenly divided on whether there should be more armed guards or police in schools, with 46.3 percent favoring and 44.8 percent opposing the policy. Of those who favored more police or guards in schools, most (63.3 percent) said they would be willing to pay higher taxes to fund them.

Methods: For this poll, the Institute surveyed 600 registered voters across the state, January 27 through February 8, resulting in a statistical margin for error of plus or minus 4 percentage points, at the 95 percent confidence level.

The questionnaire was available in both English and Spanish, and a Spanish-speaking interviewer was made available. The sample also included two-thirds land-line phones and one-third cell phones. The Simon Institute developed the questionnaire, and live phone interviews were administered by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas, which reports no Illinois political clients. The Institute paid for the project out of non-state funds from its endowment.

Note: The “Paul Simon Public Policy Institute Poll,” the “Simon Poll” and the “Southern Illinois Poll” are the copyrighted trademarks of the Board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University. Use and publication of these polls is encouraged – we ask only that you credit it to the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University.

Appendix:

Simon Poll Spring 2013

Response Frequencies • Gun Control Questions

1. What do you think is more important? Protecting the right to own guns, or controlling gun ownership?

Protecting the right to own guns	31.3%
Controlling ownership	59.5%
Other/Don't know	9.2%

2. 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?

More strict	72.3%
Less strict	2.2%
Kept the same	21.3%
Other/Don't know	4.2%

3. Do you favor or oppose banning high-capacity ammunition clips that can contain more than 10 bullets?

Favor	62.8%
Oppose	33.3%
Other/Don't know	3.8%

4. Do you favor or oppose a law which would make it illegal to manufacture, sell, or possess semi-automatic guns known as assault rifles?

Favor	58.7%
Oppose	35.2%
Other/Don't know	6.2%

5. Do you favor or oppose a law that would ban the possession of handguns, except by the police and other authorized persons?

Favor	32.7%
Oppose	61.3%
Other/Don't know	6.0%

6. Do you favor or oppose a law that would require background checks before people – including gun dealers – could buy guns at a gun show?

Favor	92.5%
Oppose	5.5%
Other/Don't know	2.0%

7. Do you favor or oppose putting more armed guards or police in schools?

Favor	46.3%
Oppose	44.8%
Other/Don't know	8.8%

8. (IF YES ABOVE, $N=278$) Would you be willing to pay higher taxes to pay for more armed guards or police in schools?

Yes	63.3%
No	30.9%
Other/Don't know	5.8%

9. Do you believe the Second Amendment includes the right to carry concealed weapons in public?

Yes	39.5%
No	49.7%
Other/Don't know	10.8%

10. (IF YES ABOVE, $N=237$) Do you believe there should be exceptions to allowing concealed weapons in public places—excluding them from such places as schools, college campuses, shopping malls and movie theaters?

Yes	71.3%
No	20.7%
Other/Don't know	8.0%