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CHIEF COUNSEL AND STAFF DIRECTOR

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

December 18, 1975

NCJRS

JUL 14 1976

Dear Colleague:

ACQUISITIONS

We have had an opportunity recently to examine the results of an in-depth survey testing public attitudes on firearms and crime. Because of the important information provided by this poll, we want to share the results with you.

The survey was taken September 29 - October 8, 1975 in the homes of 1,538 registered voters across the nation by Decision Making Information (DMI), an independent survey research firm in Santa Ana, California. DMI found that:

- Pocketbook issues continue to dominate the concerns of the average American (51%).
- Social issues have slipped considerably (24%) in the last few years in the wake of economic and energy crises.
- In unaided answers to a query on ways to reduce crime, only 11% listed gun control as their first suggestion. Of the 11% mentioning gun control, only 1% listed registration of firearms and less than 1/2% listed a ban on so-called "Saturday Night Specials" -- two specific issues currently receiving legislative attention by the Congress. The punishment category was far and away the most popular suggestion (33%).
- 86% of those surveyed rated Congress' performance in solving the crime problem as "Poor" or "Just Fair" while only 13% gave the legislators an "Excellent" or "Good" rating.
- Only 11% of the people came up with correct answers to all five questions testing their knowledge of current gun control laws, and 6% did not answer any question correctly. In most cases people erred in believing incorrectly that there were few or no laws.

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- 71% of the respondents do not favor giving the police the power to decide who may own a firearm.
- The vast majority (68%) feel that less than half of gun-owners would turn in their guns even if required to do so by the federal government.
- 84% of those questioned felt requiring the registration of handguns would not prevent criminals from acquiring or using guns for illegal purposes.
- A majority (66%) felt that, if there were any registration laws passed, they should be administered by state and local government rather than federal.
- Exactly one-half of those acknowledging gun ownership claimed to have a pistol in their household.
- Most firearms owners use their guns primarily for hunting (22%). However, 17% listed self-defense as the principal reason for ownership while 9% use it for sport or target shooting. 38% use their firearms for hunting or sport shooting combined with a self-defense use.

Since, as this survey clearly established, 82% of the American people believe in the right of law-abiding citizens to own guns, we certainly hope all Members of Congress will weigh the peoples' beliefs and attitudes carefully before gun control legislation is acted upon.

Hasty action by the Congress, particularly based on the mistaken idea that "this is what the people want," would be a serious error. On the contrary, there is overwhelming support among citizens for their right to own guns.

Moreover, many citizens recognize the enforcement difficulties of pending gun control measures. The survey showed that a majority of the people believe that less than half of firearms owners would comply with either a confiscation or registration law.

The survey results provide a valuable insight regarding the misconceptions that exist in the peoples' minds about present laws. These findings are disappointing and disturbing, and indicate the Federal Government needs to do much more in the field of education, as well as enforcement, with the laws already on the books.

For example, the survey asked five questions about present firearms laws. Unfortunately, half of those surveyed were wrong on a majority of the questions.

We hope you will reflect on these findings and their significance. If you have any further questions about this survey, please contact Eric Hultman at 224-6551.

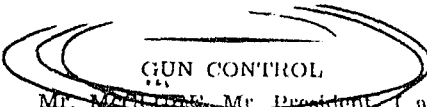
Sincerely,

Roman L. Huska
 James A. McElvire
 Gene Helms
 Lu Mitchell
 Dennis P. [unclear]
 David [unclear]
 [unclear]
 [unclear]
 Ray Roberts
 [unclear]
 [unclear]
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 John H. [unclear]

[unclear]
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 Ted Stevens
 Pete V. Domenici
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 Mike [unclear]
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 Larry Winder
 Bob Taylor



GUN CONTROL

Mr. McCLURE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the results of a new and comprehensive public opinion poll on the issue of gun control be printed in the Record at the conclusion of my remarks for the enlightenment of those Members of Congress who have not yet had the opportunity to study it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(See exhibit 1.)

Mr. McCLURE. Mr. President, this new national survey, carefully and scientifically conducted, presents some public opinion revelations on the issue of gun controls that have neither been reflected in the national press, nor probed by the much touted polls recently presented in the national media. It shows, for example, that a majority of Americans—when asked about solutions to the national crime problem place the blame where it belongs—on the criminal; and it shows that 86 percent of our people believe in the right of the individual American to keep and bear arms.

This particular public opinion survey, conducted by Decision Making Information this fall, directly challenges conclusions recently drawn by pollster Louis Harris—conclusions to the effect that most Americans would support immediate and strict Federal gun control measures. The DMI survey, asked 1,538 scientifically selected registered voters the kind of indepth question on the issue that have not been sufficiently covered in other surveys. Of specific interest were the unaided answers to a query on ways to reduce crime, only 11 percent listed gun control as their first suggestion. Of the 11 percent mentioning gun control, only 1 percent listed registration of firearms and less than one-half percent listed a ban on so-called "Saturday night specials"—two specific issues currently receiving legislative attention by the Congress.

EXHIBIT 1

ATTITUDES TOWARD GUN CONTROL: OVERVIEW
OF A NATIONAL SURVEY OF THE AMERICAN
ELECTORATE, OCTOBER 1975

SURVEY OVERVIEW

Decision Making Information is pleased to present the results of this survey. This section provides a brief overview of the research methods and techniques used in this study.

While the most sophisticated procedures have been used to collect and analyze the information presented herein, it must be remembered that surveys are not predictions. They are designed to measure public opinion within identifiable statistical limits of accuracy at specific points in time. This survey is in no way a prediction of opinion or action at any future point in time.

The project director and principal investigator for this study was Dr. Gary C. Lawrence. Overseeing and assisting in all phases

of the research activity was Dr. Richard B. Wirthlin.

Research Design

This study contains the results of an in-home survey of one thousand five hundred thirty-eight (1,538) registered voters within the continental United States (Hawaii and Alaska were not included).

Survey responses were gathered between September 30 and October 8, 1975.

All respondents interviewed in this study were part of a randomly selected sample of registered voters. A detailed explanation of this sample selection method appears on page 8. In general, random samples such as this yield results projectable to the entire universe of registered voters within ±3.0 percentage points in 95 out of 100 cases.

Interviews were conducted by Decision Making Information trained personnel throughout the United States.

Approximately 15% of all interviews were independently validated for procedure and content by a Decision Making Information professional. Completed interviews were edited and coded at DMI's headquarters in Santa Ana, California. Statistical analysis and cross-tabulations were produced by the firm's own software and computer system.

Sample Selection

Effective survey research must be based on a sample truly representative of the universe of interest. An area sampling technique was employed to gather the data for this study. All members of the universe of interest initially had the same chance to be included in the sample. This technique selected areas directly proportional to the number of persons of interest residing in that area. For example, the likelihood of choosing Los Angeles in a nationwide study of adult households would be greater than that of selecting Redding, California, because of the presence of many more households of interest.

The essential feature of this sampling procedure is that individual respondents were predetermined by the design of the survey. That predetermination was made by the careful specification of a series of random choices. The first step in creating an area sample was the division of the total universe into smaller units called primary sampling areas. A primary sampling area may be a country, a political precinct, a census tract or enumeration district. As described above, primary sampling areas were selected with a probability proportional to the size of the target of universe residing within the boundaries of that area.

From the large collection of primary sampling areas, secondary or subsampling areas were chosen. These areas might, for example, consist of a city block within a primary sampling area such as a city. Once the specific geographical area was identified, then all dwelling units within the chosen area were enumerated. From this enumeration of dwelling units containing potential respondents, a pre-specified number of dwelling units were randomly selected, and one person, again randomly chosen, within those households was interviewed.

The application of these procedures produced a calculable probability of being included in the survey sample for each member of the potential universe.

Any further questions the reader has about sampling methodology will gladly be answered by Dr. Lawrence or Dr. Wirthlin.

**SAMPLE VALIDATIONS
COMPARISON OF THIS DMI SAMPLE WITH THE GENERAL
POPULATION PARAMETERS**

	(In percent)		
	DMI sample	1972 registered to vote	1974 population parameters (18 years plus) ¹
Age:			
18 to 24.....	19.0	14.7	18.6
25 to 34.....	20.5	18.7	20.6
35 to 44.....	15.0	16.9	15.8
45 to 54.....	15.9	18.8	16.5
55 to 64.....	14.6	15.4	13.5
65 and over.....	15.0	15.4	15.1
Sex:			
Male.....	50.5	47.4	48.8
Female.....	49.5	52.6	51.2
Region:			
New England.....	6.2		5.8
Middle Atlantic.....	24.6		20.7
Outer South.....	17.2		19.4
Deep South.....	7.9		9.3
Great Lakes.....	22.1		21.4
Farm Belt.....	5.1		6.1
Mountain.....	3.8		4.5
Pacific.....	13.1		12.8
Residence:			
Urban.....	35.2	30.5	NA
Suburban.....	86.4	42.6	NA
Rural.....	28.4	25.9	NA
Race:			
White.....	81.2	86.7	86.2
Black.....	15.0	9.2	9.7
Spanish-American.....	2.8	4.1	4.1

¹ U.S. Census, projections of voting age for States, November 1974.

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE WEIGHTING PROCEDURE USED
IN THIS SAMPLE**

	Unweighted sample (N=1,538)	Weighted sample (N=1,554)	1974 population parameters (18 years plus) ¹
Age:			
18 to 24.....	12.7	19.0	18.6
25 to 34.....	21.1	20.5	20.6
35 to 44.....	15.7	15.0	15.8
45 to 54.....	16.6	15.9	16.5
55 to 64.....	15.2	14.6	13.5
65 and over.....	18.6	15.0	15.1
Sex:			
Male.....	50.0	50.5	48.8
Female.....	50.0	49.5	51.2
Region:			
New England.....	6.2	6.2	5.8
Middle Atlantic.....	24.6	24.6	20.7
Outer South.....	17.2	17.2	19.4
Deep South.....	8.1	7.9	9.3
Great Lakes.....	21.8	22.1	21.4
Farm Belt.....	5.2	5.1	6.1
Mountain.....	3.9	3.8	4.5
Pacific.....	13.0	13.1	12.8
Race:			
White.....	79.9	81.2	86.2
Black.....	16.1	16.0	9.7
Spanish-American.....	2.3	2.8	4.1

¹ U.S. Census, projections of voting age for States, November 1974.

ANALYSIS

Overview of key results

Suggested steps (unaided) to reduce crime:	Per- cent
Harsher punishment.....	33
Social causes.....	23
Better judicial system.....	11
Better police effort.....	11
Gun control.....	11

Knowledge of federal gun laws: fair to poor

Belief in right to own guns.....	82
Gun turn-in- would reduce crime—	
No.....	73
Households with gun.....	41
(Counting refused to state).....	46

THE CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

This section examines answers to questions which were posed at the beginning of the questionnaire before the general nature of the survey became known to the respondent. Because there wasn't anything in these questions to indicate our theme of the gun registration problem, the answers respondents gave form a good indication of the position of gun registration and gun confiscation attitudes in the context of all problems in the nation, all problems of the community, and problems of reducing crime specifically.

Most important national and community problems

Pocketbook issues continue to dominate the concerns of the average American in the fall of 1975 with inflation and unemployment the most important (Table I-I). Social issues—crime, social unrest, drugs, racial problems, etc.—which were so prevalent in the late 1960's have slipped considerably in the last few years in the wake of economic and energy crises. Today such social issues arouse the fears of approximately one person in four in a national context. The main component of these social concerns, crime and the need for better law enforcement, is specified as the No. 1 national problem by 18% of all voters. Though 13% may not appear to be too large a number, in the context of the great amount of attention given to pocketbook issues and considering that the responses were unaided, we must conclude that such concerns are not too far below the surface of even those who give some nonaccidental fear as the most important national problem.

Concern over social problems including crime and related issues shows up considerably more as a community problem than as a national problem—all of which could be expected. Table 1-2 indicates that one out of five voters still chooses pocketbook issues as the most important community problem, but three out of eight indicate the social issues are more important.

TABLE I-I: Most important national problem
Percent

Pocketbook.....	51
Inflation.....	25
Unemployment.....	14
Economy-general.....	10
Taxes.....	1
Depression.....	1
Poverty.....	1
Food shortage.....	*
Social.....	24
Crime/law enforcement.....	13
Social unrest.....	5
Drugs.....	2
Racial problems.....	2
Welfare.....	1
Juvenile delinquency.....	1
All other.....	25
Political corruption.....	9
Energy crisis.....	5
Foreign policy.....	6
Government spending.....	1
Ecology.....	1
President Ford.....	1
Social security.....	1

TABLE 1-1: Most important national problem—Continued

	Percent
Education	1
Air pollution	1
Don't know/no opinion	1
Unions/strikes	•
Other	•
News media	•
Over population	•

* Less than 0.5%.

Actual question wording: What do you consider to be the most important problem facing the United States today?

Table 1-2: Most important community problem

	Percent
Pocketbook	21
Unemployment	9
Inflation	5
Taxes	3
The economy	2
Lack of industry	1
Fiscal problems/cities	1
Too much welfare	1
Poverty	•
Social	37
Crime	18
Moral decay	5
Law enforcement	4
Problems/youth	4
Drugs	4
Racial problems	2
Judicial system	1
Guns/gun control	•
Prisons/parole	•
All others	42

Don't know/no opinion	7
No problems	6
Education	5
School busing	4
Lack of government leadership	3
Lack of public transportation	3
Lack of public facilities	3
Ecology	3
Urban renewal	3
Lack of low-cost housing	2
Population growth	2
Energy crisis	1
Public health	1
General	•
Other	•
Labor problems	•

* Less than 0.5%

Actual question wording: And what do you consider to be the most important problem facing your community today?

TABLE 1-3: Unaided suggestions to reduce crime

	Percent
Punishment	33
More severe punishment	23
Reinstate capital punishment	9
Severe punishment/guns	1
Allow corporal punishment	•
Social	23
Strengthen family unit	6
Reduce unemployment	6
Improve public awareness	3
Reduce moral decay	2

Solve drug problem	2
Reduce government corruption	1
Return to religion	1
Reduce poverty	1
Improve public facilities	1
Reduce poverty	1
Control TV programming	1
Solve racial problem	•
Reduce welfare	•
Police	11
Increase police force	5
Police walking beat	3
Improve/quality police	2
Increase/authority police	2
Judicial	11
Improve judicial system	9
Swift trials	2
Legalize victimless crimes	1
Gun control	11
Gun control	8
Confiscation of firearms	2
Registration of firearms	1
Citizens/protect with guns	•
Ban "Saturday night specials"	•
Penal	6
Review parole system	3
Improve rehabilitation facilities	2
Prison reform	1
Other/don't know	5
Don't know/no opinion	3
General	1
Other	•

* Less than 0.5 percent.

Actual question wording: In recent years there has been a sharp increase in the nation's crime rate. What steps do you think should be taken to reduce crime?

A reading of some of the sample verbatim responses seems to reveal some quite strong language in expressing the opinions. It appears to be a theme through many of the answers that too many criminals are going free or are not being sufficiently punished and the blame is being placed in several locations with a great amount of exasperation. Gun control as a hoped-for solution receives its share of emotion, but there is also an indication that some who suggest gun control hold the reservation that it might not work, a point that is verified quite strongly in later more specific questions.

The highest subgroup suggesting unaided that gun control be the major step to reduce crime is New England with 16%. Table 1-4 presents a profile of those above and below in suggesting unaided that gun control (including both registration and confiscation) be the first step to reduce crime. Although a larger percentage of each group shown in this table suggest another method (most of them opt for harsher punishment), the basic profiles are those that the reader will become familiar with in the pages ahead. Inclined most toward gun control are young, educated, liberal New Englanders (although it should be said in all fairness that the bulk of the New England sample came from Massachusetts and Connecticut). Those who are anti-gun control tend to be older, more conservative, and very often from the Southern States.

Aided Suggestions for Crime Reduction
Immediately after the respondents were asked the open-ended question about reduc-

tion of crime, they were given five cards listing some programs for fighting crime and asked to rank them in the order they believe would be the most effective. Once again this was done early in the questionnaire before the full nature of the interview became apparent. Table 1-5 presents the rank ordering believed to be most effective by the population as a whole. Except for the first two items, the rank order positioning of each program is statistically significant from the placement of every other program—that is, it would have been very rare for the differences between the mean scores shown to have happened by chance. Thus we see these five specific programs, the registration of all firearms and the licensing of firearm owners would be considered much less effective than stiffer sentences for criminals; a simplification of the court system, and better police efforts.

TABLE 1-4: High and low unaided suggestion of gun control as a step to reduce crime

	Percent
Above average:	
New England	16
College graduates	11
18-24 year olds	10
Great Lakes	10
Liberals	10
Nongun owners	10
Nonvoters	10
\$15-\$25 K.	10

	Percent
Average	10.1
Below average:	
Deep South	6
Refused to state gun ownership	6
Republicans	6
Senior citizens	7
Outer South	8
45-54 year olds	8
Summation: Not summable.	

TABLE 1-5: Perceived effectiveness of five specific programs for combatting crime

	Mean Score*
End plea bargaining and give convicted criminals stiff sentences	2.48
Simplify the court system to produce speedy trials and prompt sentencing	2.51
Hire more police and provide them better training and equipment	2.81
Register all firearms and license their owners	3.31
Reduce prison populations and emphasize outside rehabilitation programs	3.87

* 1.00 highest perceived effectiveness; 5.00 lowest perceived effectiveness.

Actual question wording: Each card in this stack lists some program which has been suggested as a means of combatting crime. Would you please read through the stack and then arrange the cards in the order in which you think these measures would be most effective, that is, which one would be most effective, which one second most effective, and so on.

Table 1-6 presents a demographic profile of the chief supporters of each specific program, and Table 1-7 expands this profile for those who choose registration of firearms and licensing of gun owners. In many cases over the years of studying attitudes of Americans, we have used the data to point out contrasts from the commonly held stereotypes. In the present question, however, the truth

does not differ all that greatly from the commonly held stereotype—in fact, the profile shown in Table I-7 of those highest in support of gun registration is as cohesive and clean as any we have discovered.

Another point which should be noted is that the higher the education, the less the inclination to believe that greater police effort will reduce crime.

Congressional rating

Congress is given very poor ratings on the job it is doing to solve the crime problem today as can be seen in Table I-8. It is very sad commentary on the effectiveness of this august body when two out of five (42%) rate its effort as poor and a similar number rate it as just fair. It is obvious that voters of all different persuasions band together in this

assessment of Congress. Some of the groups harshest on Congress on this item include:

- Males
- 55-64 year olds
- 25-34 year olds
- College graduates
- Post graduates
- Independent voters
- Mountain States
- Gun owners

TABLE I 6.—GROUPS HIGHEST IN AIDED SELECTION OF SPECIFIC PROGRAMS FOR CRIME REDUCTION

	High group					High group			
	Sex	Age	Education	Region		Sex	Age	Education	Region
End plea bargaining and give convicted criminals stiff sentences.	Male.....	155	64	Less high school. ¹	Mountain. ¹	Female...	45-54	Less high school. ¹	Outer South. ¹
Simplify the court system to produce speedy trials and prompt sentencing.	do	156	64	Postgrads. ¹	Mountain and Pacific.	do	118-24	Postgrads....	New England ¹ Pacific. ¹
						Male.....	118-24	College grads. ¹	

¹ Groups deviate significantly from average.

TABLE 1-7: Groups highest and lowest in aided choice of gun registration as program for crime reduction

	Mean*
Highest:	
Singles	2.90
18-24 year olds	2.93
New England	2.99
Nongun owners	3.02
Liberals	3.10
Low gun law knowledge	3.12
Females	3.18
Average	3.31
Lowest:	
High gun law knowledge	3.08
Refused/gun ownership	2.88
Gun owners	3.85
45-54 year olds	3.51
Rural	3.48
Republicans	3.50

*1.00=High; 5.00=Low.

TABLE 1-8: Rating of Congress on solving crime problem

How would you rate the job Congress is doing to solve the crime problem today—excellent, good, just fair, or poor?

	Percent
Excellent	1
Good	12
Just fair	44
Poor	42
No opinion	2

Knowledge of Federal Gun Laws

It is obvious from Table II-1 that Americans are lacking rudimentary knowledge about federal gun laws. The majority believes that a person can drive across the state line and buy a handgun and also believes that one can buy a gun by mail order from another state. About half of them are correct about a person convicted of a robbery a few years ago not being able to buy a gun, but still 51% either believe he can (42%) or aren't quite sure (9%). A majority got the correct answer about a person under 21 being unable to buy a gun and 86% of them sensed that a firearms dealer must keep records of some sort by law. We believe that the last two items were the most easy to answer which makes their knowledge scores even less impressive. The greatest amount of controversy on these points deals with the misconceptions surrounding mail order

guns and ease of purchase such as driving across a state line. On these two points only about one person in three gets the correct answer.

As a summary of responses, one out of ten could answer all five questions correctly and an additional one in five could answer four questions correctly. As shown in Table II-1, if this were a test the grading curve would be skewed toward the bottom.

Contrary to expectations, the higher the formal education, the lower the score on this knowledge test. One might also expect older respondents with more experience to have the correct answers, but the opposite is the case; the younger the respondent the more the knowledge. Some stereotypes continue to hold true as shown in Tables II-2 and II-3.

Gun owners score consistently better than non-gun owners, but even a majority of them are mistaken in two out of the five cases.

TABLE II-1: Knowledge of Federal gun laws

I'm going to ask you a series of questions about buying a gun. Tell me in each case whether you think Federal Law, as it stands today, prohibits or does not prohibit the gun purchase I describe.

	Percent correct
Under present law, can a person buy a gun by mail order from another State.	36
Under present law, can a person drive across a State line and buy a handgun?	28
A person was convicted of a robbery some years ago. Under present law, can he go into a gun shop and buy a gun?	40
Under present law, can a person under 21 go into a gun shop and buy a handgun?	57
Under the present law, must a firearms dealer keep records on each gun he sells and the person to whom he sells it?	86
Summary of responses:	Percent
Five correct answers	11
Four correct answers	18
Three correct answers	21
Two correct answers	23
One correct answer	23
No correct answers	6

TABLE II-2: Groups highest and lowest on overall knowledge of Federal gun laws

	Mean score
Highest knowledge:	
Deep South	2.98
Black	2.99
18-24 years old	3.07
Own gun(s)	3.20
Oppose/police power to regulate	3.30
Lowest knowledge:	
65 years and over	3.85
College graduate	3.80
New England	3.85
Post graduate	3.75
65-84 years old	3.68
Republican	3.03
Don't own gun(s)	3.00

TABLE II-3.—GROUPS LOWEST IN FEDERAL GUN LAW KNOWLEDGE, BY SPECIFIC CASES

	Sex	Area	Region
Purchase by mail	Female ¹	Urban	New England. ¹
State line	do	Rural	Farm Belt
Former convict	do	Rural ¹	Great Lakes
Under 21	do	Rural	New England. ¹
Dealer keep records	do	Urban	Do. ¹

¹ Groups deviate significantly from average.

TABLE III-1: Beliefs of rights to own firearms

Do you believe that you, as a citizen have a right to own a gun, or not?

	Percent
Yes	82
No	17
Don't know	1

Do you believe that the Constitution of the United States gives you the right to keep and bear arms, or not?

	Percent
Yes	78
No	18
Don't know	4

Do you think that the "right to keep and bear arms" applies to each individual citizen or only to the National Guard?

	Percent
Individual citizen	70
National Guard	21
Both	3

Beliefs in Citizens' Right to Own Firearms

Probes of a person's belief as to whether or not he has the right to own a firearm were built into the questionnaire at separate

locations. The first two questions shown in Table III-1 occurred fairly early in the questionnaire and a third question almost toward the end. As can be seen, the other arguments of the questionnaire did not contaminate Americans' belief that they indeed do have the right to own a firearm, thus indicating even more the stability of these beliefs as well as the very strong majorities who hold that attitude.

The belief is especially strong among gun owners, people in the Southern states and Farm Belt states, in rural areas and somewhat surprisingly (given soft patterns elsewhere) college graduates (Table III-2). Note in the table that those who refuse to indicate whether or not they own a gun are also above average in believing they have the right to own one, an indication (as will be pursued in Section IX) that those refusing to answer the question on gun ownership are indeed gun owners.

TABLE III-2: Groups highest and lowest on belief of right of gun ownership

Highest:	Percent
Own gun(s).....	84
Deep South.....	93
Outer South.....	91
Farm Belt.....	91
No/Turn-in guns would not reduce crime.....	89
Rural.....	88
Refused gun ownership.....	88
College graduate.....	87
Lowest:	
Yes/Turn-in guns would reduce crime.....	38
New England.....	35
Don't own gun.....	27
Middle Atlantic.....	24

Current and potential arguments on gun control both pro and con
Comparison Arguments

Seven comparison arguments were tested wherein opposing arguments on specific points were submitted to the respondent under the fictitious names of Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones and the respondent asked to indicate how closely he agreed with one man's position or the other. The exact wording used and the percentage results are found in Table IV-1.

Collapsing all answers to the seven positions into a point system, we can classify 52% of the population as either very or slightly anti-gun control versus 24% of the population very or slightly pro-gun control; 25% are in the middle ground.

Examining some of the specific scores of gun control support groups we find very few deviations from the most powerful arguments among respondents as a whole. The claim that every citizen has the right to own a gun is the most powerful argument. The fruitlessness argument—that is, that criminals would find some way to get guns anyway—is a good second argument in most demographic subgroups. It is also a good first argument with non-gun owners, females and residents of New England (mainly Massachusetts and Connecticut). The argument that criminals would simply turn to rifles and shotguns even if the handgun population could be reduced would also be a good argument.

On the other side, the contention that criminals would simply ignore the registration law would not work too well on the pro-gun control groups nor would the argument that some domestic shootings are not enough reason to deprive everybody of the right to own a gun.

TABLE IV-1: Comparison arguments

Smith believes that if firearms must be registered, there would be less crime because fewer people would have guns.

	Percent
Exactly like Smith.....	14
Lean toward Smith.....	17
Smith believes that no private individual should be allowed to own a handgun.	

	Percent
Exactly like Smith.....	13
Lean toward Smith.....	11

Jones believes that when it gets right down to it, it's up to him to protect himself and his family.

	Percent
Exactly like Jones.....	25
Lean toward Jones.....	29

Smith believes prohibiting private ownership of handguns would cause fewer handguns to be available and therefore crime would go down.

	Percent
Exactly like Smith.....	11
Lean toward Smith.....	19

Smith believes that firearms registration would enable police to solve crimes by tracing firearms to their owners.

	Percent
Exactly like Smith.....	14
Lean toward Smith.....	22

Smith believes that firearms registration would make it more difficult for the potential criminal to get a gun.

	Percent
Exactly like Smith.....	11
Lean toward Smith.....	19

Smith believes that confiscation of handguns would decrease murders because these weapons wouldn't be convenient when someone got angry.

	Percent
Exactly like Smith.....	21
Lean toward Smith.....	23

Jones believes that if firearms must be registered, there would still be the same amount of crime because criminals would ignore the registration law.

	Percent
Exactly like Jones.....	39
Lean toward Jones.....	31

Jones believes that any law-abiding citizen without a criminal record should be entitled to keep a handgun if he or she wants to.

	Percent
Exactly like Jones.....	44
Lean toward Jones.....	31

Smith believes that the protection of citizens from criminals should be left up to the police.

	Percent
Exactly like Smith.....	17
Lean toward Smith.....	30

Jones believes that even if criminals couldn't get handguns they'd simply use rifles and shotguns instead.

	Percent
Exactly like Jones.....	40
Lean toward Jones.....	30

Jones believes that firearms registration would not help solve more crimes because criminals wouldn't register their firearms.

	Percent
Exactly like Jones.....	38
Lean toward Jones.....	26

Jones believes that firearms registration wouldn't really help because potential criminals determined to get guns would get them anyway.

	Percent
Exactly like Jones.....	46
Lean toward Jones.....	25

Jones believes that occasional domestic shootings are tragic, but are not enough reason to deprive everybody of the right to own a gun.

	Percent
Exactly like Jones.....	27
Lean toward Jones.....	29

Government Arguments

The population is evenly split on the contention that a national gun registration program would eventually lead to the confiscation of registered guns by the government. As can be seen in Table IV 2, the bulk of the population does not place itself in the extreme categories of agreeing strongly or disagreeing strongly. When this occurs it is usually an indication that the idea is new to the respondents and/or hasn't been thoroughly thought through yet. In the light of the strong belief that the Constitution gives people the right to own guns, we believe that the answers to this statement indicate that the idea of government confiscating even registered guns is viewed as quite far-fetched in most people's minds.

The fears of eventual confiscation by government drops the higher the education. The Great Lakes States have the highest fear that this might happen, the Middle Atlantic States the strongest disagreement. We also find (Computer Printout page 583) that the Deep South disagrees with that fear more than they agree with it. This is perhaps some indication that the source of gun support in the Deep South is not tied to fears of confiscation. Also (page 585) gun owners themselves are not all that enthused about the argument. One subgroup where the confiscation fear is strong (albeit we're dealing with a small subsample, N = 43) is the Mexican-American community. Here 74% agree that the government might eventually confiscate registered guns. The Blacks, on the other hand, do not differ significantly from the population as a whole.

The low fear of confiscation is not to say, however, that government is viewed as benevolent and just as can be seen in Table IV 3. If a law were passed requiring people to register their guns, only 30% would want the federal government to regulate the ownership and use of firearms, whereas the vast majority would want a government closer to home to run the operation. Local government units would be first choice with 37%.

TABLE IV-2: Attitudes toward eventual Government confiscation of firearms

A national gun registration program will eventually lead to the confiscation of registered guns by the government.

	Percent
Agree strongly.....	18
Just agree.....	32
Just disagree.....	35
Disagree strongly.....	16

TABLE IV-3: Level of government desired for any regulation of firearms and perceived fairness

If a law were passed requiring people to register their guns, which level of government do you think should regulate the ownership and use of firearms—federal, state, or local?

	Percent
Federal.....	30
State.....	29
Local.....	37
No opinion.....	4

How fair do you think the government would be in administering this task—very fair, somewhat fair, or not very fair?

	Percent
Very fair.....	23
Somewhat fair.....	54
Not very fair.....	23

We can also tell from Table IV-3 that the days of honest faith in government are over. Only one person in four believes that the government (at whatever level, but most apparently assumed federal) would be very fair in administering the task of regulating firearms ownership and use; about half equivocate on this and say that they expect somewhat fair treatment.

The Mountain States would be the most fertile ground in which to campaign against federal involvement firearms regulation. The Farm Belt, the Deep South and rural areas in general also appear predisposed to anti-federal arguments.

In terms of cynicism toward government administration of the task, post graduates (normally not an anti-gun control group) are very cynical on this point. The Mountain States again turn out to be very cynical as do those who already oppose gun control laws. Not many subgroup distinctions in this item appear beyond these few.

People Arguments

The contention that "If we are serious about solving crime and violence, we must concentrate more on people than on weapons" is strongly supported by the vast majority of Americans; fewer than one in ten disagree with the statement. The Outer South and the Pacific States are above average in support of this contention. See Table IV-4.

Assassination Arguments

Arguments being heard in some quarters that laws banning the handgun or at least requiring registration could prevent assassination attempts on public officials just are not being bought by the American public. There is very strong disagreement that banning private ownership of handguns could avoid an assassination attempt (Table IV-5); most of this emotion seems to stem from perceptions of utter unenforceability of handgun laws as will be examined in Section V.

TABLE IV-4: Attitudes toward people related arguments

If we are serious about solving crime and violence, we must concentrate more on people than on weapons.

	Percent
Agree strongly.....	63
Just agree.....	29
Just disagree.....	5
Disagree strongly.....	3

The constituencies who are above average in disagreeing with this argument form a slightly different profile than we've become accustomed to:

- 25 to 34 year olds
- The high educated groups (in fact, the higher the education the greater the disagreement)
- Deep South
- Mountain States
- Pacific States (perhaps California's attempt to do penance and reject the kook label)

When the specific instances of assassination attempts on President Ford were presented for respondent consideration, even if there had been a law requiring the registration of all handguns, four out of five people do not believe that law would have prevented Sarah Jane Moore and Lynnette Fromme from obtaining guns. And of course having obtained guns, there was even less to

prevent them from using them. A few more people believe that such registration laws would have prevented Moore from her attempt than would have prevented Fromme, but these are very small percentages (Table IV-5). In most cases where we can isolate current or potentially pro-gun control groups, we seem to find a hardcore 20-25% in such groups.

Police Discretionary Power Argument

By almost a three to one margin, Americans reject the idea of giving police the power to decide who may and who may not own a firearm (Table IV-6). Literally every subgroup analyzed has a majority of its members in opposition to this idea. The margin by which Americans reject this concept and the strong inter-subgroup consistency can only lead us to conclude that certain national pollsters and commentators have misinterpreted their findings and are seriously misreading the total set of attitudes Americans have toward the types, and extent, of gun controls they are willing to support.

TABLE IV-5: Assassination prevention arguments

Assassination attempts on public officials could be avoided by banning private ownership of handguns.

	Percent
Agree strongly.....	12
Just agree.....	17
Just disagree.....	30
Disagree strongly.....	41

Within the past few weeks, two people have tried to assassinate President Ford. From what you've heard and read, if there had been a law requiring the registration of all handguns, do you think that law would have prevented these two people from obtaining guns, or not?

	Percent
Yes—would have prevented both.....	16
Would have prevented Fromme only.....	1
Would have prevented Moore only.....	4
No—would not have prevented.....	78
No opinion.....	2

TABLE IV-6: The question of police power to determine gun ownership

Would you favor or oppose a law giving police the power to decide who may or may not own a firearm?

	Percent
Favor.....	27
Oppose.....	71
No, opinion.....	2

Potential effectiveness and enforceability of gun registration and confiscation laws

One of the most telling points of the whole study is that three out of four American citizens do not believe that even such a stringent law as turning in all weapons would reduce crime (Table V-1). The key element in the belief that such a law would be ineffective is that they don't believe that criminals would give up their guns—in essence, criminals and citizens alike would resist the law in the belief that they are granted the rights by a higher law (the Constitution). This is quite a clear cut pattern of pragmatic realistic attitudes lined up against a naive idealism.

The public's perceived compliance with registration and turn-in laws further illustrates the fruitlessness of the effort. As shown in Table V-2, the vast majority does

not believe over half of all Americans would even register their firearms with the Federal government let alone comply with a turn-in law.

Another aspect of the effectiveness argument is found in Table V-3 where over eight people in ten believe that registration will not prevent criminals from acquiring or using handguns for illegal purposes. Again this appears to be common sense borne out with statistics. There is also some evidence shown in the table that people have become more realistic and less idealistic about the gun control issue in the last 7 years. In 1968, a Harris poll claimed that 45% of the public believe control of guns might cut down on violence, whereas now only 37% believe that gun control might help stop violence. A counterpoint is that almost two out of three now believe that control of guns might not cut down on violence at all.

On the compliance issue shown in Table V-2, subgroup patterns are generally what we have come to expect in terms of those who would be the least unbelieving (most idealistic) that firearms owners would comply with the law. On the gun confiscation side of compliance, we see that the young people are most cynical. High cynicism about a turn-in law was also found in the Farm Belt, the Southern States and the Mountain States.

TABLE V-1: Perceived effectiveness of a gun turn-in law

Just suppose Congress passed a law requiring all guns to be turned in. Do you think such laws would be effective in reducing crime, or not?

	Percent
Yes—would reduce crime.....	25
No—wouldn't reduce crime.....	73
Don't know.....	3
Effective:	
Would reduce crime.....	11
Guns less available.....	5
Reduce crimes passion.....	4
Record of gun owners.....	1
Reduce accidents by guns.....	1
Ineffective:	
Criminals won't give guns.....	26
People won't turn in guns.....	14
Gun available/general.....	10
Guns/black market.....	7
Impossible to enforce law.....	5
General.....	4
People uses guns for protection.....	4
Not all guns registered.....	2
Unconstitutional.....	1
Wouldn't reduce crime.....	1
Severe penalties for breaking law.....	1
Don't know/no opinion.....	1
Control only hand guns.....	•
Other.....	•

*Less than 0.5%.

TABLE V-2: Perceived compliance with laws requiring registration and turning-in of all guns

If a law were passed requiring people to register their guns with the Federal government, how many firearm owners do you think would comply with the law?

	Percent
All.....	1
Most.....	23
Half.....	30
A few/some.....	45
None.....	2

If a law were passed requiring people to turn in all their guns to the Federal government, how many firearm owners do you think would comply with the law?

	Percent
All	1
Most	8
Half	24
A few/some	59
None	9

TABLE V-3: Perceived effectiveness of gun registration laws

Registration of handguns will not prevent criminals for acquiring or using them for illegal purposes.

	Percent
Agree strongly	53
Just agree	31
Just disagree	11
Disagree strongly	6

Control of guns might not cut down on violence at all.

	DMIs	Harris
	1975	1968
Agree strongly	30	46
Just agree	33	
Just disagree	22	
Disagree strongly	15	

Gun ownership patterns and reasons

To try to encourage more gun owners to admit ownership of their weapons, we used a secret envelope technique. Toward the end of the interview the respondent was given an envelope with a sheet of questions on it which he or she filled out personally. We thought that making gun ownership admission a little easier (as opposed to having to verbally say it to an interviewer) would get a more accurate reading of actual gun ownership in the nation. The results as shown in Table VI-1 indicate that the percentage of guns measured differs only slightly from national published polls where the question was asked verbally.

Approximately 5% refuse to state whether or not they own a gun. As we have examined the attitudes of this specific group throughout the analysis, we have come to the conclusion that their attitudes are so much like gun owners (and in many cases are even more intense than those of gun owners) that the bulk of these people could not be classified as non-gun owners. In essence then, our measurement is that 46% of all adults in the nation own some type of firearm.

Table VI-1 also indicates that over half of the respondents admit to owning the gun themselves and about two out of five in all gun owner households claim the gun is owned by some other family member. The same table presents the percentage of gun owners who own various types of firearms.

As can be seen, about one person in ten (9%) owns all three types of firearms—pistols, shotguns, and rifles. Consistent with some stereotypes, there is a greater correlation between rifle owners and shotgun owners than there is between either and pistol owners.

The profiles of pistol owners, shotgun owners and rifle owners as shown in Table VI-4 verify this last point. Blacks, for example, are not above average in owning shotguns and rifles, but are very high in owning pistols. The highest educated group is above average on pistols but not on owning shotguns or rifles. Residents of suburbs are more likely to own pistols, whereas owning a shotgun or a rifle is naturally enough a function of rural areas.

TABLE VI-1.—GUN OWNERSHIP

	[In percent]			
	DMI 1975	Gallup 1975*	Harris 1968*	ORC 1968*
Do you have guns of any kind in your home?				
Yes, own gun(s).....	41	44	49	45
No, Don't own gun(s).....	54	56	51	50
Refused (most likely gun owners).....	5			5

Do they belong to you or do they belong to some other member of your family? *

	Percent of gunowners
Owned by me.....	58
Owned by other family member.....	39
Both.....	5
Refused.....	4
Any pistols in home:	
Yes.....	50
Refused.....	7
Any shotguns in home:	
Yes.....	57
Refused.....	7
Any rifles in home:	
Yes.....	62
Refused.....	7

*Fairly similar wording, but orally asked.

TABLE VI-2: Subgroup patterns of admitted gun ownership

	Percent
Highest:	
Mountain.....	60
Rural.....	56
Deep South.....	54
Farm Belt.....	50
Outer South.....	49
\$15,000-\$24,999 income.....	48
\$25,000 and over income.....	48
Male.....	48
Republican.....	48
Lowest:	
Middle Atlantic.....	27
New England.....	28
\$0-\$4,999 income.....	30
Urban.....	30
Female.....	34
55-64 years old.....	36

TABLE VI-4: Profiles of gunowners by firearms category

	Percent of gunowners
Own a pistol:	
Outer South.....	66
Black.....	62
Post graduate.....	62
Mountain.....	57
Some college/technical.....	57
\$25,000 and over income.....	56
Suburban.....	55
Own a shotgun:	
Republican.....	69
Deep South.....	67
45-54 years old.....	65
Rural.....	65
Great Lakes.....	64
Independent.....	63
\$10,000-\$14,999 income.....	62
\$25,000 and over income.....	62
Own a rifle:	
Rural.....	76
College graduates.....	71
Pacific.....	70
Republican.....	70
Mountain.....	69

\$15,000-\$24,999 income.....	69
18-24 years old.....	68
White.....	68

As for use of guns as a source of security and reasons for gun ownership, Table VI-5 reveals about 45% of all respondents would personally feel that the presence of a gun in their homes would make them feel more secure. The profiles of those who would feel more secure versus those who would not feel more secure about having a gun in a home follow almost the exact same pattern we have discovered over and over in this analysis and hence does not need to be repeated here. Feelings of security caused by a gun in a home elicits profiles that are highly correlated with constituency groups who oppose gun control versus those who do not.

Which one of the following choices best

Approximately one gun owner in six (17%) is willing to claim that he owns a gun for self-defense only. Self-defense as a secondary purpose to hunting or sport shooting is mentioned by an additional 38% (Table IV-5). Therefore we can say that fully 55% of all gun owners admit to self-defense and security as at least a secondary reason for owning a gun if not the primary reason. The top subgroups who own a gun only for self-defense include:

- Blacks (almost half own it for this reason alone)
- Lowest Income Group
- Senior Citizens
- Urban Residents
- Deep South
- Farm Belt
- Less than High School
- Highest Income Group
- Democrats
- Outer South

TABLE VI-5: Guns as a source of security and reasons for gun ownership

Asked of all respondents:

Do you personally feel that the presence of a gun in your home would make you feel more secure, or not?

	Percent
Yes—more secure.....	45
No—not more secure.....	55
No opinion.....	1

Asked of gun owners only:

Which one of the following choices best describes the reason you own a gun?

	Percent
I own it for self-defense.....	17
I own it for hunting.....	22
I own it for sport or target shooting.....	9
I own it mainly for hunting, but I'm glad it's there for self-defense.....	24
I own it mainly for sport or target shooting, but I'm glad it's there for self-defense.....	14
Other.....	10
Refused.....	5

SUMMARY

The following list is a nutshell recap of key findings which originate from the attitude patterns discussed in more detail in the previous sections.

1. On a national level Americans are still very much preoccupied with pocket book issues. Concern over crime and related social issues is still fairly substantial on the national level but, even more important, on the local level.

2. The lack of gun control laws is not spontaneously mentioned as either a national problem or a local problem by a significant

December 19, 1975

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number of citizens. Their attention had to be called to the issue before they expressed an opinion.

3. Harsher punishment is the main step suggested to reduce crime. Solving the social causes is the number two most often mentioned step to reduce crime. Improved judicial system and better police efforts receive as many unaided responses as the idea of gun control. In another question, gun control is ranked fourth most effective of five specific programs tested.

4. Congress has a very poor performance rating on crime solutions.

5. The strongest support for gun control positions comes from New England, 18 to 24 year olds, liberals, women, and to some extent from upper education groups and the Middle Atlantic States.

6. The greatest opposition to gun control positions comes from the Deep South, the Outer South, the Mountain States, rural areas, middle-aged groups, conservatives, and men.

7. Americans are quite ignorant about federal gun laws. Pro-gun control groups are generally lowest on knowledge, but gun owners, while above average, still have a lot to learn.

8. On three separate occasions in the questionnaire, respondents verified overwhelmingly their belief of their right to own guns as private citizens. The argument that the National Guard is the body the framers of the Constitution intended to bear arms for the populace just is not accepted.

9. All told, the best argument in the majority of cases is still the head-on contention that citizens have the right to own guns. The next most effective (and because it is more graphic and more action-oriented, maybe in some cases the most effective) is the fruitlessness or "it won't work" argument. There are three key forms tested which found very good response:

Criminals will simply ignore the registration law.

Even if the number of handguns is reduced, criminals will find a way to get them anyway.

Even if it were possible to eliminate all handguns, criminals would simply switch to using rifles and shotguns instead.

10. American attitudes are still very fluid on gun control. It is not an issue that most people think about day to day, nor is the lack of a gun registration law a major concern to them. The attitudes haven't jelled yet and information is still quite scanty.

11. A solid majority of Americans rejects the suggestion that police be given the power to decide who may or may not own a gun.

12. Arguments that gun registration laws would discriminate against low income and minority groups aren't plausible even among these groups themselves.

13. The vast majority of Americans does not believe that any gun registration or gun control law would have prevented the two recent attempts on President Ford's life.

14. We believe that approximately 46% of all American adults have a firearm of some type in their homes. Over half of them admit that security and self-defense play at least a secondary role in the reason they own their guns.

END

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