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Va. Tech Shootings

LITTLE BOOST FOR GUN CONTROL OR AGREEMENT ON CAUSES

Last week's shootings at Virginia Tech have had little immediate impact on public opinion about gun control. Six-in-ten Americans say it is more important to control gun ownership, while 32% say it is more important to protect the right of Americans to own guns. Opinion has changed little since 2004, when 58% said it was more important to control gun ownership than to protect the rights of gun owners.

At the same time, a 55% majority opposes a ban on the sale of handguns, while just 37% favor such a ban. There was greater support for gun control in the late 1990s and in 2000. In 2000, the public was evenly split over a handgun ban (47% favor/47% opposed).

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted April 18-22 among 1,508 adults, finds deep public differences about whether mass shootings like those at Virginia Tech reflect broader problems in society or are just the isolated acts of individuals.

Roughly half (47%) say such shootings are isolated acts, while about as many (46%) say they reflect broader societal problems. Opinions on this issue are divided politically; a solid majority of conservative Republicans (57%) say shootings like the one at Blacksburg are just the isolated acts of troubled individuals. Most liberal Democrats (59%) blame broader problems in American society.

	Feb 2004	April 2007
<i>Which is more important?</i>	%	%
Protect gun owners' rights	37	32
Control gun ownership	58	60
Don't know	5	8
	100	100
<i>Ban on handgun sales</i>		
Favor	--	37
Oppose	--	55
Don't know	--	8
		100
<i>These types of shootings...</i>		
Are isolated acts	--	47
Reflect broader problems	--	46
Don't know	--	7
		100

Those who say the shootings reflect fundamental societal problems offer a variety of explanations. Overall, 37% volunteer problems related to morality or social values, while 23% cite shortcomings in the mental health, legal, or school systems. Just 14% mention gun laws or issues related to gun control.

Gender Divide Over Causes

There is a sizable gender gap in opinions about whether the Virginia Tech shootings, and others like them, are isolated acts of troubled individuals, or represent broader societal problems. By 55%-39%, men generally believe that such shootings are just isolated acts. By a nearly identical margin (54%-37%), women say shootings like the one at Blacksburg reflect broader problems in American society.

While liberal Democrats generally say these tragedies reflect problems in society – and conservative Republicans say the opposite – other political groups are more evenly divided. Among independents, moderate and liberal Republicans, and conservative and moderate Democrats, roughly the same number point to broader societal problems as say these shootings are the isolated acts of troubled individuals.

Notably, residents of the West are more likely than those in other regions to say that large-scale shootings are the acts of troubled people. People in the Northeast, by contrast, mostly point to broader societal problems.

People who said that the shootings at Virginia Tech and similar tragedies reflect broader problems in society differ in their views about those problems. Nearly half of Republicans who say the shootings

What 'Broader Problems' Do the Shootings Reflect?	
%	
37	Morality/Social Values
11	Moral breakdown
9	Violence on TV/Movies/Games
9	Family breakdown
5	Lack of community / Nobody cares
5	Youth out of control / No discipline
3	Lack of religion
23	Social/Government Systems Failures
13	Mental health system / Didn't get help
5	Legal system / Laws don't do enough
3	Security system / Need more security
3	School system failing
14	Gun laws / Too easy to get guns
12	Social/Personal Pressures
4	Social alienation/Isolation/Despair
3	Youth can't cope/Too much pressure
2	Rich-poor divide breeds anger
2	Racial divisions/Minorities face pressures
1	Bullying
	Other problems
5	Copycat violence / Press glorifies story
4	Crazy people in the world / He was crazy
2	Immigration
7	Other
11	Don't know

Based on those who say shootings reflect broader societal problems. Figures add to more than 100% due to multiple responses.

Large-Scale Shootings: Isolated Acts or Reflective of Broader Problems			
	Broader problems	Isolated acts	DK
	%	%	%
Total	46	47	7=100
Men	37	55	8=100
Women	54	39	7=100
Conserv Repub	39	57	4=100
Mod/Lib Repub	46	49	5=100
Independent	46	47	7=100
Cons/Mod Dem	46	45	9=100
Liberal Democrat	59	35	6=100
White	45	48	7=100
Black	49	44	7=100
Northeast	53	42	5=100
Midwest	44	49	7=100
South	46	45	9=100
West	39	53	8=100
Urban	49	45	6=100
Suburban	46	46	8=100
Rural	37	54	9=100

reflect broader societal problems cite issues with morality or social values; that compares with just 26% of Democrats. Democrats who say the shootings reflect broader societal problems are much more likely than Republicans to mention gun laws or the ease with which people can buy guns (22% vs. 8%).

	Rep %	Dem %	Ind %
Morality/Social values	48	26	38
Social/Govt systems failed	20	24	25
Gun laws / Too easy to get guns	8	22	12
Social/Personal pressures	8	11	15
Copycat violence / Press coverage	6	7	4
Crazy people in the world	4	7	2
Immigration	2	1	2

Based on those who say shootings reflect broader societal problems. Figures add to more than 100% due to multiple responses.

Gun Control Trends

In recent years, majorities have consistently said it is more important to control gun ownership than to protect the rights of gun owners, although opinions have fluctuated somewhat. Support for controlling gun ownership peaked in March 2000, less than a year after the shootings at Columbine High School. At that time, 66% said it was more important to control gun ownership, while just 29% thought it was more important to protect the rights of gun owners.

Support for gun owners' rights subsequently increased, reaching a high point of 42% in June 2003 before falling back to 37% in February 2004. Currently, there is somewhat less support for gun owners' rights than three years ago, though the overall balance of opinion has not changed substantially.

	Dec 1993	May 1999	Mar 2000	May 2000	June 2003	Feb 2004	April 2007
<i>More important to...</i>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Protect gun owners' rights	34	30	29	38	42	37	32
Control gun ownership	57	65	66	57	54	58	60
Don't know	9	5	5	5	4	5	8
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Ban on handgun sales</i>							
Favor	45	44	47	--	--	--	37
Oppose	51	50	47	--	--	--	55
Don't know	4	6	6	--	--	--	8
	100	100	100				100

Yet there is somewhat greater opposition to a law banning the sale of handguns than there was in 2000 or the late 1990s. Currently, 55% say they oppose such a ban, compared with 47% in 2000. There are deep differences in opinions on both gun control questions. For instance, men oppose a ban on handgun sales by more than two-to-one (64%-30%). Women are fairly evenly divided over such a ban, with 47% opposed and 44% in favor.

By a wide margin (75%-21%), Republicans oppose a law banning handgun sales. Half of Democrats support a law prohibiting handgun sales, while 43% are opposed. Most independents (54%) oppose a ban on handgun sales, while 38% support a ban.

Impact on Children

Most parents of school age children say their kids have followed coverage of the shootings (56%), and most have talked either a lot (19%) or some (39%) with their children about the events at Virginia Tech. At the same time, four-in-ten parents of children in Kindergarten through 12th grade say their kids have not followed the story, and 24% say they have not talked about the events with their kids at all.

Four-in-ten parents say they have been trying to restrict how much coverage of the shootings their children watch, while 58% have not. Mothers are significantly more likely to say they are trying to restrict how much their kids see than are fathers (46% vs. 32%).

Most parents with children in college also report talking either a lot (27%) or some (28%) about the Virginia Tech shootings with their children, but about a quarter (28%) have not talked about the incident with their college kids at all. Most college parents (57%) say their kids in college have expressed no fears about safety at their school since the shootings, while 10% say their children in college have expressed a lot of concern about safety.

	<i>Parents of school-age children</i>		
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Moms</u>	<u>Dads</u>
<i>Children following the shootings?</i>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	56	57	54
No	40	40	41
Don't know	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>5</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Trying to restrict their viewing?</i>			
Yes	40	46	32
No	58	52	67
Don't know	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Talked w/ children about shootings...</i>			
A lot	19	19	19
Some	39	39	38
Not much	17	19	16
Not at all	24	23	26
Don't know	<u>1</u>	<u>*</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100	100
Number of cases	(359)	(199)	(160)

	<i>Parents of college-age children</i>	
	<u>Discussed events</u>	<u>Expressed concerns</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
A lot	27	10
Some	28	13
Not much	15	14
Not at all	28	57
Don't know	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>
	100	100
Based on 215 parents with children attending college.		

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a nationwide sample of 1,508 adults, 18 years of age or older, from April 18-22, 2007. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

For results based on parents of children in school (N=359) or college (N=215), one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 6 and 7.5 percentage points, respectively.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

ABOUT THE CENTER

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
APRIL 2007 POLITICAL SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
April 18-22, 2007
N=1508

QUESTIONS 1 THROUGH 19 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

Q.20 Would you favor or oppose a law that banned the sale of handguns?

		March <u>2000</u>	Sept <u>1999</u>	May <u>1999</u>	Dec <u>1993</u>
37	Favor	47	46	44	45
55	Oppose	47	50	50	51
<u>8</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>
100		100	100	100	100

Q.21 What do you think is more important – to protect the right of Americans to own guns, OR to control gun ownership?

		Feb <u>2004</u>	June <u>2003</u>	May <u>2000</u>	April <u>2000</u>	March <u>2000</u>	June <u>1999</u>	May <u>1999</u>	Dec <u>1993</u>
32	Protect right of Americans to own guns	37	42	38	37	29	33	30	34
60	Control gun ownership	58	54	57	55	66	62	65	57
<u>8</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>9</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Q.22 How much, if anything, did you read or hear about a shooting at Virginia Tech University that resulted in the death of 33 people? A lot, a little, or nothing at all?

87	A lot
11	A little
1	Nothing at all
<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

Q.23 Do you think this shooting and others like it reflect broader problems in American society, or are things like this just the isolated acts of troubled individuals?

46	Broader problems
47	Isolated acts
<u>7</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

IF 1 IN Q.23 "BROADER PROBLEMS," ASK [N=687]:

Q.23a Just in your own view, what broader problems does this shooting reflect?" [OPEN END; ACCEPT MULTIPLE RESPONSES; DO NOT PROBE FOR ADDITIONAL]

37	MORALITY/SOCIAL VALUES (NET)
11	Moral breakdown / People don't know right from wrong
9	Violence in society/Movies/TV/Music/Video games
9	Family breakdown / Children neglected
5	Lack of community / No one cares or pays attention
5	Youth out of control / Selfish / No discipline

	3	Lack of religion
23		SOCIAL/GOVERNMENT SYSTEM FAILURES (NET)
	13	Mental health system not helping those in need
	5	Legal system / Laws don't allow these people to be locked up
	3	Not enough security
	3	School system failing
14		Gun laws/Too easy to get guns
12		SOCIAL/PERSONAL PRESSURES (NET)
	4	Social alienation / Isolation / Despair
	3	Young people can't cope / High-pressure/fast-paced society breeds insecurity
	2	Rich-poor divide breeds anger
	2	Racial divisions / Minorities face pressures
	1	Bullying
5		Copycat violence / Media coverage glorifies/sensationalizes
4		Crazy people in the world / He was crazy
2		Immigration
7		Other
11		Don't know/Refused

ASK ALL:

PARENT Are you the parent or guardian of any children under 18 now living in your household?

37	Yes
63	No
*	Don't know/Refused
<u> </u>	
100	

IF 'YES' (1 IN PARENT) ASK [N=444]:

SCHOOL And how many children do you have living in your household that are attending school, including kindergarten through 12th grade?

22	None
31	One
47	More than one
<u> </u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

IF CHILD IN SCHOOL (2,3 IN SCHOOL) ASK [N=359]:

PUBLIC And (does your child/do your children) attend public or private school(s)?

83	Public
11	Private
0	Catholic school/Parochial school/Religious school (VOL.)
*	Charter school (VOL.)
4	Both/Multiple (VOL.)
2	Neither/Home school (VOL.)
<u> </u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

KID1 Thinking about your school-age (child/children), (has/have) your (child/children) been following news about the shootings at Virginia Tech, or not?

56 Yes
40 No
4 Don't know/Refused
100

KID2 Have you been trying to restrict how much coverage of the shootings your (child watches/children watch) or not?

40 Yes
58 No
2 Don't know/Refused
100

KID3 How much have you talked about the shootings with your (child/children)? **(READ)**

19 A lot
39 Some
17 Not much
24 Not at all
1 **(VOL. DO NOT READ)** Don't know/Refused
100

ASK ALL:

COLLEGE And are you the parent of a full-time or part-time college student? **(IF 'YES' ASK: do you have one or more than one child in college?)**

10 Yes, one
3 Yes, more than one
87 No
* Don't know/Refused
100

IF CHILD IN COLLEGE (1,2 IN COLLEGE) ASK [N=215]:

COLL1 How much have you discussed the shootings with your (child/children) in college? **(READ)**

27 A lot
28 Some
15 Not much
28 Not at all
2 Don't know/Refused **(VOL. DO NOT READ)**
100

COLL2 (Has/Have) your college age (child/children) expressed any fears about safety at their school since the Virginia Tech shootings? **(READ)**

10 A lot
13 Some
14 Not much
57 Not at all
6 Don't know/Refused **(VOL. DO NOT READ)**
100

ASK ALL:

Q.71 Do you happen to have any guns, rifles or pistols in your home?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>
April, 2007	37	61	2=100
January, 2007	33	64	3=100
December, 2004	37	60	3=100
Mid-October, 2004	39	59	2=100
Mid-July, 2003 ¹	34	63	3=100
August, 2002	35	62	3=100
April, 2000	35	62	3=100
June, 1997	40	57	3=100
December, 1993	45	53	2=100

1 From 1997 to 2003, the question asked about “guns or revolvers in your home.” In 1993, the question asked about “guns in this household.”

ASK ALL:

PARTY In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?

IF ANSWERED 3, 4, 5 OR 9 IN PARTY, ASK:

PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?

	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	(VOL.) No Preference	(VOL.) Other Party	DK/ Ref	<i>Lean Rep</i>	<i>Lean Dem</i>
April, 2007	25	28	40	5	*	2=100	13	17
March, 2007	25	36	33	3	*	3=100	12	16
February, 2007	25	34	34	4	*	3=100	10	18
Mid-January, 2007	24	35	34	3	*	4=100	12	18
Early-January, 2007	23	31	39	4	*	3=100	12	18
December, 2006	25	35	32	5	*	3=100	11	17
Mid-November, 2006	25	36	32	4	*	3=100	9	18
Late October, 2006	26	32	33	5	1	3=100	10	16
Early October, 2006	27	34	33	3	*	3=100	12	15
Early September, 2006	30	34	30	3	*	3=100	10	14
August, 2006	30	33	30	4	*	3=100	12	14
July, 2006	29	33	31	4	1	2=100	11	14
June, 2006	29	34	31	4	*	2=100	11	16
April, 2006	29	32	30	5	*	4=100	10	14
Early April, 2006	29	32	33	3	*	3=100	12	16
March, 2006	28	34	30	4	*	4=100	11	15
February, 2006	30	33	31	3	*	3=100	11	16
January, 2006	28	32	32	5	*	3=100	10	15
Yearly Totals								
2006	27.6	32.8	30.3	5.0	.4	3.9=100	10.2	14.5
2005	29.2	32.8	30.3	4.5	.3	2.8=100	10.2	14.9
2004	29.5	33.1	30.0	4.0	.4	3.0=100	11.8	13.6
2003	29.8	31.4	31.2	4.7	.5	2.5=100	12.1	13.0
2002	30.3	31.2	30.1	5.1	.7	2.7=100	12.6	11.6
2001	29.2	33.6	28.9	5.1	.5	2.7=100	11.7	11.4
2001 Post-Sept 11	30.9	31.8	27.9	5.2	.6	3.6=100	11.7	9.4
2001 Pre-Sept 11	28.2	34.6	29.5	5.0	.5	2.1=100	11.7	12.5
2000	27.5	32.5	29.5	5.9	.5	4.0=100	11.6	11.6
1999	26.6	33.5	33.7	3.9	.5	1.9=100	13.0	14.5
1998	27.5	33.2	31.9	4.6	.4	2.4=100	11.8	13.5
1997	28.2	33.3	31.9	4.0	.4	2.3=100	12.3	13.8
1996	29.2	32.7	33.0	5.2=100			12.7	15.6
1995	31.4	29.7	33.4	5.4=100			14.4	12.9
1994	29.8	31.8	33.8	4.6=100			14.3	12.6
1993	27.4	33.8	34.0	4.8=100			11.8	14.7
1992	27.7	32.7	35.7	3.9=100			13.8	15.8
1991	30.9	31.4	33.2	4.5=100			14.6	10.8
1990	31.0	33.1	29.1	6.8=100			12.4	11.3
1989	33	33	34=100					
1987	26	35	39=100					

IF ANSWERED 1 IN PARTY, ASK:

PARTYSTR Do you consider yourself a STRONG Republican or NOT a strong Republican?

	<u>Strong</u>	<u>Not Strong/ Don't Know</u>
April, 2007	14	11=25%
January, 2007	12	11=23%
Mid-November, 2006	14	11=25%
Late-October, 2006	14	12=26%
Early-October, 2006	15	12=27%
September, 2006	17	13=30%
December, 2005	16	13=29%
December, 2004	18	13=31%
July, 2004	17	12=29%
August, 2003	14	13=27%
September, 2000	14	13=27%
Late-September, 1999	10	14=24%
August, 1999	11	14=25%
November, 1997	11	14=25%
October, 1995	11	19=30%
April, 1995	15	15=30%
October, 1994	16	15=31%
July, 1994	13	16=29%
June, 1992	11	17=28%
May, 1990	13	15=28%
February, 1989	15	16=31%
May, 1988	13	15=28%
January, 1988	12	15=27%
May, 1987	11	14=25%

IF ANSWERED 2 IN PARTY, ASK:

PARTYSTR Do you consider yourself a STRONG Democrat or NOT a strong Democrat?

	<u>Strong</u>	<u>Not Strong/ Don't Know</u>
April, 2007	15	13=28%
January, 2007	17	14=31%
Mid-November, 2006	22	14=36%
Late-October, 2006	18	14=32%
Early-October, 2006	19	15=34%
September, 2006	18	16=34%
December, 2005	20	14=34%
December, 2004	19	15=34%
July, 2004	20	13=33%
August, 2003	15	16=31%
September, 2000	19	15=34%
Late-September, 1999	15	16=31%
August, 1999	15	18=33%
November, 1997	14	18=32%
October, 1995	14	16=30%
April, 1995	14	15=29%
October, 1994	18	14=32%
July, 1994	15	18=33%
June, 1992	14	18=32%

PARTYSTR CONTINUED...

	<u>Strong</u>	<u>Not Strong/ Don't Know</u>
May, 1990	16	17=33%
February, 1989	17	21=38%
May, 1988	19	19=38%
January, 1988	19	20=39%
May, 1987	18	19=37%