



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER  
For The People & The Press

JULY 30, 2012

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## Views on Gun Laws Unchanged After Aurora Shooting

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# Views on Gun Laws Unchanged After Aurora Shooting

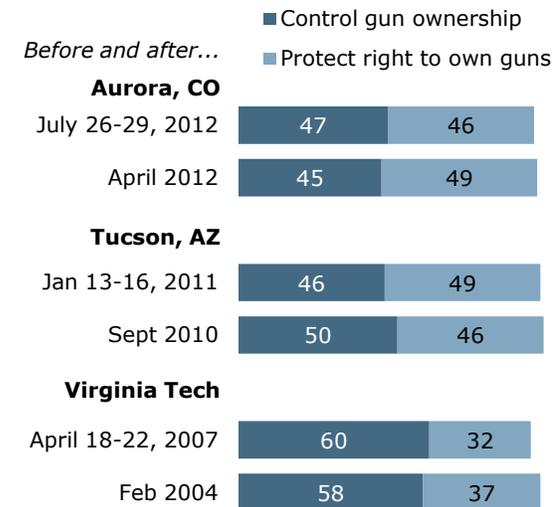
There has been no significant change in public views on the issue of gun control and gun rights following the July 20<sup>th</sup> shooting at a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado. Currently, 47% say it is more important to control gun ownership, while 46% say it is more important to protect the rights of Americans to own guns. That is virtually unchanged from a survey earlier this year in April, when 45% prioritized gun control and 49% gun rights.

Other recent major shootings also had little effect on public opinion about gun laws. There was no significant change in the balance of opinion about gun rights and gun control after the January, 2011 shooting in Tucson, Arizona in which Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was injured. Nor was there a spike in support for gun control following the shooting at Virginia Tech University in April, 2007.

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted July 26-29, 2012 among 1,010 adults, shows that relatively few Americans view the shooting in Aurora as a sign of broader social problems. Two-thirds (67%) say that shootings like this one are just the isolated acts of troubled individuals. Only about a quarter (24%) say shootings like this reflect broader problems in American society. This is similar to the public reaction after the Tucson shooting in early 2011, which 58% thought of as the isolated act

## Shootings Don't Shift Views on Gun Control

What do you think is more important?



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## Most See Aurora Shooting as an Isolated Event

	Apr 2007 VA Tech Shooting	Jan 2011 Tucson, AZ Shooting	July 2012 Aurora, CO Shooting
Shootings like this one...	%	%	%
Are just the isolated acts of troubled individuals	47	58	67
Reflect broader problems in American society	46	31	24
Don't know	7	12	8
	100	100	100

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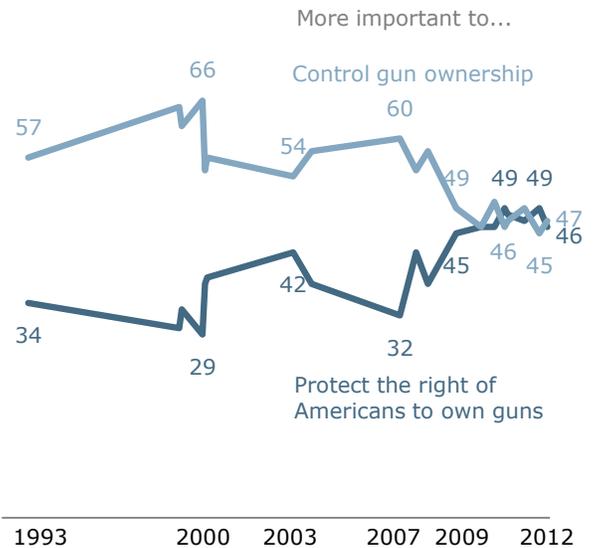
of a troubled individual and 31% connected to broader social problems. Americans were more likely to see broader problems behind the Virginia Tech shooting five years ago – at that time, 46% thought the event reflected broader societal problems.

Public opinion about gun control and gun rights has been divided since early 2009. Prior to that, going back to the first Pew Research Center polling on this issue in 1993, majorities consistently rated controlling gun ownership as a higher priority than protecting the rights of Americans to own guns.

The issue remains a highly partisan one: Republicans prioritize gun rights by a 71% to 26% margin, while Democrats prioritize gun control by a 72% to 21% margin. Independents are split, with 50% saying the priority should be protecting the right of Americans to own guns, while 43% say it should be controlling gun ownership.

The issue also continues to divide along racial and gender lines. Whites tend to see the protection of gun rights as the higher priority (by a 56% to 38% margin), while blacks overwhelmingly back gun control (by a 73% to 23% margin). Men prioritize gun rights (57% to 38%), while women prioritize gun control (56% to 37%).

### Gun Control Loses Support in Recent Years



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## About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted July 26-29, 2012 among a national sample of 1,010 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (609 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 401 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 190 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see: <http://people-press.org/methodology/>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the March 2011 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2011 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	1,010	3.6 percentage points
Republicans	277	6.9 percentage points
Democrats	303	6.6 percentage points
Independents	338	6.2 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

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.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**  
**July 26-29, 2012 OMNIBUS**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**N=1,010**

**PEW.1 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**ASK ALL:**

Thinking about the shooting in Colorado last week...

PEW.2 Do you think this shooting reflects broader problems in American society, or are things like this just the isolated acts of troubled individuals?

July 26-29 <u>2012</u>		<b>TRENDS FOR COMPARISON</b>	
		Jan 13-16 <u>2011</u> <sup>1</sup>	Apr 18-22 <u>2007</u>
24	Broader problems	31	46
67	Isolated acts	58	47
8	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>	12	7

**PEWWP.1-PEWWP.3 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**NO QUESTIONS PEW.3-PEW.9**

**PEW.10-PEW.21 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**NO QUESTIONS PEW.22-PEW.23**

**ASK ALL:**

On a different subject,

PEW.24 What do you think is more important – to protect the right of Americans to own guns, OR to control gun ownership?

	<u>Protect right to own guns</u>	<u>Control gun ownership</u>	<b>(VOL.) DK/Ref</b>
July 26-29, 2012	46	47	6
Apr 4-15, 2012	49	45	6
Sep 22-Oct 4, 2011	47	49	5
Feb 22-Mar 1, 2011	48	47	6
Jan 13-16, 2011	49	46	6
Aug 25-Sep 6, 2010	46	50	4
Mar 10-14, 2010	46	46	7
Mar 31-Apr 21, 2009	45	49	6
April, 2008	37	58	5
November, 2007	42	55	3
April, 2007	32	60	8
February, 2004	37	58	5
June, 2003	42	54	4
May, 2000	38	57	5
April, 2000	37	55	8
March, 2000	29	66	5
June, 1999	33	62	5
May, 1999	30	65	5
December, 1993	34	57	9

<sup>1</sup> January, 2011 question asked about the shooting in Tucson, Arizona. April, 2007 question was asked after the shooting at Virginia Tech and asked about "this shooting and others like it."