Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics

Gun Violence and Mass Shootings

A Survey of 485 Registered Voters in Pennsylvania

Prepared by: The Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics at Mercyhurst University

Joseph M. Morris, Director
Rolfe D. Peterson, Methodologist
Jake Jaskiewicz, Project Manager
Brooke Miller, Project Manager

Table of Contents

Summary of Findings

In 2012 there were no fewer than seven mass shootings in the United States, and many of them occurred in public places such as movie theaters, malls and schools. Since the tragic shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012, a nationwide dialog about how to prevent future mass shootings has begun. This dialog includes President Obama, members of Congress, and state legislators across the nation. The conversation has focused on increasing the police presence in public places, making guns more difficult to buy, limiting the capacity of ammunition magazines, banning assault rifles, requiring more background checks for gun buyers, improving mental health screening, and arming school teachers. The Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics polled 485 (MOE +/-4.5) registered voters in Pennsylvania to learn about Pennsylvania voters' opinions on these proposals.

The poll, which was conducted between January 30 and February 6, 2013 finds that while registered voters in Pennsylvania say a wide range of actions would help prevent mass shootings in public places, improving mental health screening, requiring background checks for all gun sales and increasing the presence of police officers and armed security guards are seen as most effective by the largest majorities. Majorities of registered voters in Pennsylvania also support passing laws that limit the capacity of ammunition magazines, institute background checks for all gun sales and ban private citizens from owning armor piercing ammunition, but oppose a law that would allow teachers to carry guns in classrooms. Among individuals in households where a gun is present, less support was given to traditional gun control measures such as banning assault rifles, outlawing armor piercing ammunition, making guns more difficult to purchase, and limiting the capacity of ammunition magazines. However, a majority of those polled who live households where a gun is present favor background checks on all people buying a gun including purchases made at gun shows and from private sellers.

Preventing Mass Shootings in Public Places
Registered voters in Pennsylvania say that nearly all of the proposals currently being debated would help prevent mass shootings in public places, but some are

viewed as more effective than others. Majorities of Pennsylvania voters say that banning large capacity of ammunition magazines (55%) or military-style assault rifles (58%) would help prevent mass shootings "a lot" or "some;" while large majorities say that improving mental health screening (84%), requiring background checks for all people buying a gun (81%) and increasing the presence of armed police officers or security guards (73%) would do so. A large majority (76%) also says that depictions of violence in popular culture and video games contribute "a lot" or "some" to mass shootings in public places.

Not surprisingly, individuals who say that either they or someone in their household owns a gun are less likely to say that gun control measures will prevent mass shootings in public places. Of the individuals polled who say that they or someone in their household owns a gun (n=242), less than a majority say making guns more difficult to buy (37%), banning large capacity magazines (44%) and banning military style assault rifles (45%) would help prevent mass shootings "a lot" or "some." Of those polled who say that neither they or a member of their household own a gun (n=209), strong majorities say making guns more difficult to buy (69%), banning large capacity magazines (73%), and banning military-style assault rifles (80%) would help prevent shootings "a lot" or "some." Strong majorities of both groups, however, say that requiring background checks on all people buying a gun would be helpful in preventing shootings.

Table 1. Percent Saying Proposal would Help Prevent Mass Shootings in Public Places: Individuals with Gun in Household v. No Gun in Household

	Do you or a member of your household own a gun?	
	Yes*	No*
More police or armed security guards would help "a lot" or "some"	81%	63%
Making guns more difficult to buy would help "a lot" or "some"	37%	69%
Banning large capacity magazines would help "a lot" or "some"	44%	73%
Banning military-style assault rifles would help "a lot" or "some"	45%	80%
Requiring background checks on all people buying a gun would help "a lot" or "some"	77%	87%
Improving mental health screening would help "a lot" or "some"	83%	87%
Depiction of violence in popular culture and video games would help "a lot" or "some"	75%	76%

The margin of error is larger than +/-4.5% when subgroups of the survey are being analyzed. Table 1 shows the percent who believe that the policy would help 'a lot' or 'some' by whether a member of the household owns a gun. Registered voters with a gun in the house are less likely to believe that banning assault weapons or limiting ammunition will help prevent gun violence compared to households without gun owners. Both groups believe that mental health screening would help prevent shootings.

Arming Teachers in Pennsylvania Schools

Recently, Pennsylvania lawmakers and school officials began addressing a somewhat controversial proposal for preventing mass shootings in the commonwealth's schools: allowing teachers trained in the use of firearms to carry guns in classrooms. Registered voters in Pennsylvania oppose (56%) this proposal. Opposition to this proposal comes largely from individuals who say that neither they nor a member of their household owns a gun, with 76% (of those polled) of individuals living in a household without a gun opposing the proposal. Among individuals living in a household where a gun is present, a slim majority (51% of those polled) favor the proposal.

Proposals to Prevent Gun Violence

When asked about proposals to reduce gun violence in general, registered voters in Pennsylvania support a wide range of proposals. Solid majorities say they would support a law that limits ammunition magazines to a maximum capacity of ten rounds (60%) and a law that bans private citizens from possessing armor piercing bullets (56%), and strong majorities support laws that require background checks for all gun sales including guns sold at gun shows and by private sellers (86%), increases the penalty for gun trafficking (93%), and improves mental health screening for young people (79%). As was the case with questions about how to prevent mass shootings, individuals who reside in a household where someone owns a gun are less supportive of proposals aimed at preventing gun violence that involve traditional gun control measures (see Table 2). Individuals who live in a household where someone owns a gun, however, are supportive of a law requiring criminal background checks for all gun sales including guns sold at gun shows and by private sellers (82%).

Table 1. Support for Laws Aimed at Preventing Gun Violence: Individuals with Gun in Household v. No Gun in Household

	Do you or a member of your household own a gun?	
	Yes*	No*
Support a law requiring criminal background checks for all gun sales including guns sold at gun shows and by private sellers	82%	91%
Support a law that limited ammunition magazines to a maximum capacity of ten rounds	48%	77%
Support a law banning private citizens from possessing armor piercing ammunition	48%	67%
Support a law increasing the penalties for individuals convicted of gun trafficking	92%	93%

The margin of error is larger than +/-4.5% when subgroups of the survey are being analyzed. Table 2 shows the percent who 'support' the proposed law by whether a member of the household owns a gun. While both groups support universal background checks and increased penalties for gun trafficking, there is a divide on limiting ammunition capacity.

Frequency Report

Interviews were completed with 485 registered voters in Pennsylvania. For a sample size of 485, there is a 95 percent probability that our survey results are within plus or minus 4.5 points (the margin of error) of the actual population distribution for any given question. For subsamples the margin of error is larger (depending on the size of the subsample). The data were weighted on age and gender to correct for minor discrepancies between sample and population. Due to rounding, column totals may not equal 100 percent. Bracketed or italicized text are instructions to interviewers.

To begin, over the past month there has been a lot of talk in the news about mass shootings in public places, such as schools, movie theaters, and malls. I'm interested in learning how you think we might prevent future mass shootings in public places.

Q.1 How much do you think more police or armed security guards would do to help prevent mass shootings in public places such as schools, movie theaters, and malls? Would more police or armed security guards help a lot, some, not much or not at all?

A lot	29%
Some	44%
Not much	19%
Not at all	7%
Depends (volunteered)	0%
DK	0%
RF	1%

Q.2 How much do you think making guns more difficult to buy would do to help prevent mass shootings in places? Would making guns more difficult to buy help a lot, some, not much, or not at all?

A lot	28%
Some	22%
Not much	22%
Not at all	26%
Depends (volunteered)	1%
DK	1%
RF	0%

Q.3 How much do you think banning large capacity ammunition magazines would do to help prevent mass shootings in public places? Would banning large capacity ammunition magazines help a lot, some, not much, or not at all?

A lot	35%
Some	20%
Not much	19%
Not at all	24%
Depends (volunteered)	1%
DK	1%
RF	-

Q.4 How much do you think banning military style assault rifles would do to help prevent mass shootings in public places? Would banning military style assault rifles help a lot, some, not much, or not at all?

A lot	39%
Some	19%
Not much	17%
Not at all	22%
Depends (volunteered)	0%
DK	1%
RF	0%

Q.5 How much do you think requiring background checks on all people buying a gun would do to help prevent mass shootings in public places? Would requiring background checks help a lot, some, not much, or not at all?

A lot	46%
Some	35%
Not much	10%
Not at all	8%
Depends (volunteered)	0%
DK	0%
RF	0%

Q.6 How much do you think improving mental health screening would do to help prevent gun violence? Would better mental health screening help a lot, some, not much, or not at all?

A lot	54%
Some	30%
Not much	8%
Not at all	5%
Depends (volunteered)	1%
DK	2%
RF	1%

Q.7 In general, how much do you think the depiction of violence in popular culture, such as movies and video games, contributes to mass shootings in public places? Would you say it contributes a lot, some, not much, or not at all?

A lot	38%
Some	38%
Not much	17%
Not at all	7%
Depends (volunteered)	1%
DK	1%
RF	0%

Q.8 Recently, some school districts in some states have begun talking about allowing teachers and school administrators to carry guns while at work. If a Pennsylvania school teacher was trained how to use a gun, would you favor or oppose allowing the teacher to carry a gun in the classroom?

Favor	37%
Oppose	56%
Depends (volunteered)	4%
DK	2%
RF	0%

Now I would like to get your thoughts on proposals that have been made in order to reduce or prevent gun violence, including mass shootings, in the United States.

Q.9 Would you support or oppose a law requiring criminal background checks for all gun sales, including guns sold at gun shows and by private sellers?

Support	86%
Oppose	12%
Depends (volunteered)	1%
DK	1%
RF	1%

Q.10 Would you support or oppose a law that limited ammunition magazines to a
      maximum capacity of 10 rounds?

Support	60%
Oppose	36%
Depends (volunteered)	1%
DK	2%
RF	1%

Q.11 How about a law banning private citizens from possessing armor piercing
      ammunition?
      [Would you support or oppose]

Support	56%
Oppose	35%
Depends (volunteered)	4%
DK	5%
RF	1%

Q.12 How about a law that increased the penalties for individuals convicted of gun
      trafficking?
      [Would you support or oppose]

Support	93%
Oppose	5%
Depends (volunteered)	1%
DK	1%
RF	1%

Q.13 How about a law that increased government spending for mental health programs for young people?

[Support or oppose]

Support	79%
Oppose	16%
Depends (volunteered)	3%
DK	3%
RF	0%

Q.14 How about a law that increased government spending for training police officers, first responders and school officials on how to respond to armed attacks?

[Support or oppose]

Support	85%
Oppose	12%
Depends (volunteered)	2%
DK	1%
RF	0%

Q.15 How about providing school districts and law enforcement agencies with additional money to hire school resource officers, school psychologists, social works and counselors?

[Support or oppose]

Support	69%
Oppose	21%
Depends (volunteered)	6%
DK	4%
RF	1%

Q.16 How about providing federal money to help school districts develop
      emergency management plans?
      [Support or oppose]

Support	75%
Oppose	21%
Depends (volunteered)	1%
DK	2%
RF	0%

Q.17 Finally, I have a few questions that we'll be using for statistical purposes.
      Generally speaking, would you consider yourself to be a liberal, a
      conservative, a moderate, or have you not thought much about this?

Liberal	17%
Conservative	32%
Moderate	27%
Not thought about	22%
DK	2%
RF	1%

Q.18 Do you consider yourself to be a Democrat, Republican, member of some
      other political party, or an independent?

Democrat	39%
Republican	38%
Independent	18%
Other party	2%
DK	1%
RF	2%

Q.20 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Less than high school	5%
High school	27%
Some college/associates degree/technical	26%
College	25%
Graduate Degree	18%
DK	-
RF	0%

Q.21 What is your age?

18-28 years old	16%
29-38 years old	14%
39-48 years old	17%
49-58 years old	20%
59-68 years old	16%
68 years or older	18%

Q.22 Do you consider yourself to be a Born Again Christian?

Yes	31%
No	65%
DK	1%
RF	4%

Q.23 What is your marital status?

Married	65%
Single	23%
Divorced	5%
Widowed	6%
Partnership	0%
Other	0%
DK	-
RF	2%

Q.24 If you add together the yearly incomes, before taxes, of all the members of your household for the past year, what would the total be?

[Read categories]

$0-$30,000	10%
$30,000-$60,000	17%
$60,000-$100,000	20%
$100,000-$150,000	11%
Over $150,000	10%
DK	5%
RF	26%

Q.25   What is your race?

White	86%
Black	7%
Hispanic	1%
Asian-American	0%
Other	1%
DK	0%
RF	5%

Q.27 Do you or a member of your household own a gun?

Yes	50%
No	43%
DK	0%
RF	7%

Q.28 Do you or a member of your household hunt?

Yes	39%
No	59%
DK	-
RF	3%

Q.29 Are you a member of the National Rifle Association?

Yes	13%
No	85%
DK	1%
RF	2%

Q.30 What is your gender? (DO NOT ASK, JUST RECORD ANSWER)

Male	49%
Female	51%

Methodology

This report summarizes the results of a survey of registered voters in Pennsylvania, which was conducted between Wednesday, January 30th and Wednesday, February 6, 2013. During the 8 day field period interviewers called weekday evenings between the hours of 6:00 and 9:00 PM and between 11:00 AM and 6:00 PM on weekends. For each working phone number, interviewers made no fewer than six attempts to contact individuals selected to participate in the study. Calls were generated by CATI software or manually dialed and relied on a list of randomly selected registered voters Pennsylvania obtained from Voter Contact Services.

A total of 485 individuals were interviewed. For a sample size of 485, there is a 95 percent probability that the results are within plus or minus 4.5 points (the margin of error) of the actual population distribution for any given question. For subsamples, the margin of error is higher (depending on the size of the subsample). Aside from sampling error, there are several factors that prevent the results obtained through a probability sample from being a perfect representation of the results that would be obtained if the entire population was interviewed. This non-sampling error may be caused by of a variety of factors including, but not limited to, response rate and question order. In this survey, a variety of techniques were employed to reduce common sources of non-sampling error.

Response Rate
Calculating a response rate for a particular study involves considering a number of variables (see http://www.aapor.org/Response_Rates_An_Overview.htm); but, simply stated, it refers to the percentage of individuals in a sample that, when contacted, elect to participate in a study by responding an interviewer's questions. In recent years, researchers have documented a sharp decline in response rates. Today, a typical study that relies on telephone interviews can expect a response rate of between 20 and 30%. Although it is unclear if, or to what extent, response rate is a source of non-sampling error, most polls strive to maximize response rate by making multiple attempts to contact individuals and taking steps to secure their cooperation once they have been reached. In this way, our study of registered voters in Pennsylvania is no different than most polls: No fewer than six attempts were made to contact hard-to-reach individuals. These attempts occurred during weekday evenings, mornings and on Saturday afternoons. To ensure a high rate of cooperation, interviewers received training on conversion techniques that are consistent with research ethics as identified by the Mercyhurst University Institutional Review Board.

Questions

This report contains the questions as worded on the questionnaire and in the order in which they were asked. Some of the questions include bracketed information, which is, in every case, an instruction to the programmer or interviewer. Whenever possible, question order was randomized to ensure that respondents did not receive a set order of response options, which allowed response set bias to be minimized. For structured (close-ended) questions, interviewers were trained to probe for clarity when respondents' answers were not identical to the predefined response options. For unstructured (open-ended) questions, interviewers were trained to record verbatim responses whenever possible. In cases where a respondent asked that a question or response option be repeated, interviewers were careful to re-read the entire question or all response options.

Data

Data collected during this study was prepared for analysis by director and associate director of Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics. Data preparation included, but was not limited to, removing partial interviews (respondent-terminated interviews) from the dataset. To maximize the accuracy of our results and correct for discrepancies between our sample and the population, the data were weighted on gender and age. Simply stated, weighting is when data collected from survey respondents are adjusted to represent the population from which the sample was drawn.

Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics

The Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics (MCAP) began operations in July 2010. Inspired by the mission of Mercyhurst University and guided by the university's core values, the center promotes reasoned discourse about problems facing communities, states and nations. It accomplishes this objective by providing elected officials, government agencies, news organizations, and nonprofits with accurate and unbiased assessments of public opinion; and offering a nonpartisan forum for public debates and roundtable discussions that address pressing public problems.

The centerpiece of MCAP is the state of the art computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) facility. The facility, which is located in the Center for Academic Engagement, is comprised of thirty-one interviewer stations and staffed by well-trained research associates. The specialized computer software used to conduct telephone interviews generates random telephone numbers in a predefined geographic area or dials from a list, and allows research associates to accurately complete even the most complex interviews.

The center also has the ability to design and administer online surveys. This method of interviewing is ideal for organizations that have relatively up-to-date email addresses for their members. The software used by MCAP allows a researcher to administer a survey - whether short and simple or long and complex – to an unlimited number of email addresses. In addition, a researcher has the ability to monitor response rates and send out reminders, thereby ensuring that the study produces high quality results.

As the Northwestern Pennsylvania's only CATI facility whose primary purpose is to regularly and accurately gauge public opinion, the MCAP is an invaluable resource for community leaders. Each year the center conducts polls on issues of local, state and national interest. The results of these studies are made available to the public via the university's webpage (polisci.mercyhurst.edu/mcap). In addition to its annual polls, the center offers its services to private parties, nonprofits, news organizations, and government agencies for minimal cost.

Please direct questions about the center to Dr. Joseph M. Morris, Director, Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics, Mercyhurst University, 501 E. 38th Street, Erie, PA, 16546, (814) 824-2154, jmorris@mercyhurst.edu.

The Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics was established with a generous gift from Erie Insurance.