

April 10, 2008

## Americans Support Common Sense Measures to Cut Down on Illegal Guns

**To:** Interested Parties  
**From:** Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research  
The Tarrance Group

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A new bipartisan survey conducted for the Mayors Against Illegal Guns coalition reveals that Americans see stopping gun violence as one of their most important goals, and there is strong support for a number of common sense initiatives to cut down on gun violence. While supporting the right to own guns, Americans also favor a number of key measures targeting illegal guns, including requiring criminal background checks for people buying guns at gun shows and prohibiting people on terrorist watch lists from purchasing guns.

In addition, this survey shows that the Presidential candidates can make headway with the public this year by championing some specific measures to reduce gun violence that enjoy widespread support, while still supporting Second Amendment rights—views that most Americans see as compatible.

The survey also shows broad support for measures targeting illegal guns among both Americans who support Senator John McCain and those who support Senator Barack Obama or Senator Hillary Clinton.

The following are key findings from a national survey of 800 Americans conducted March 31 – April 3, 2008 by Democratic polling firm Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and Republican polling firm The Tarrance Group on behalf of Mayors Against Illegal Guns. The sample is subject to a margin of error of approximately 3.5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

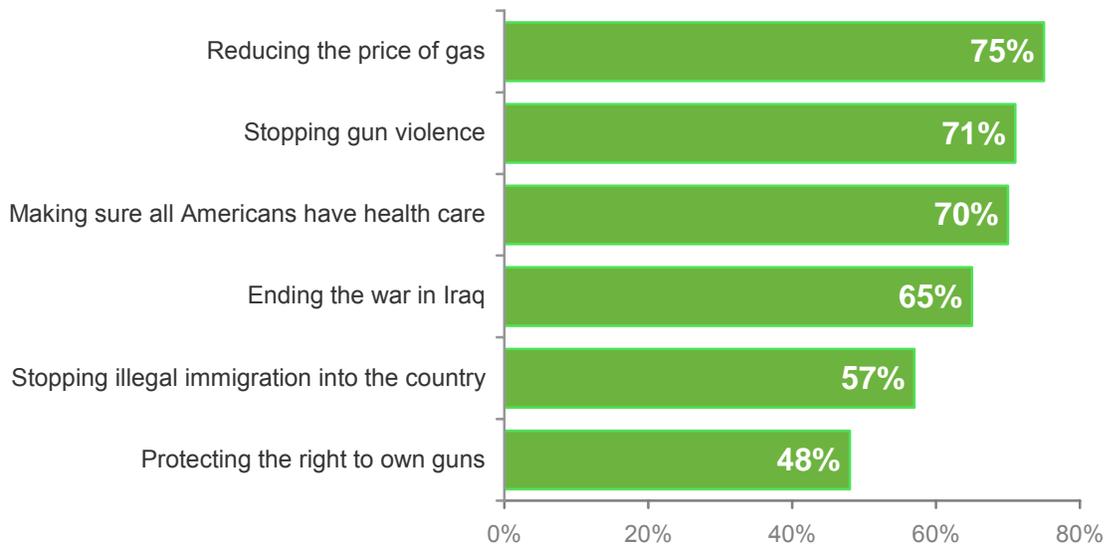
- **Stopping gun violence is a top goal for most Americans.** More than seven in ten Americans (71 percent) believe that stopping gun violence is a “very important” goal. This is the same proportion of people who believe that making sure all Americans have health care is very important (70 percent), and only slightly less than the 75 percent who believe that reducing the price of gas is very important. In addition, 48 percent of Americans cite protecting the right to own guns as very important to them.

Across the electorate, stopping gun violence is an important goal, cited as “very important” by a majority of gun owners (59 percent), Democrats (83 percent) and Republicans (61 percent). The partisan divide on the importance of stopping gun violence (a 22-point partisan gap) is significantly smaller than the partisan split for stopping the Iraq war (46 points), making sure all Americans have health care (34 points), or protecting gun rights (36 points).

■ **Figure 1:** Percentage of Americans who say that this issue is 'very important'

### Stopping Gun Violence is Very Important to Americans

*Now, I am going to read some goals people in this country are talking about. For each one, please tell me how important that goal is to you - very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important.*

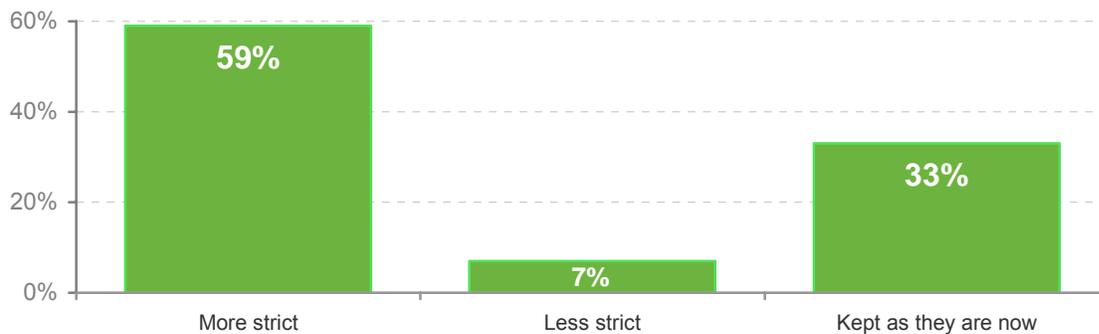


- **Nearly 60 percent of Americans favor stricter gun laws.** A majority of Americans, 59 percent, believe that the laws covering the sale of guns should be made more strict than they are currently. This is very similar to the 56 percent of Americans who said so in a January 2007 poll conducted for Mayors Against Illegal Guns. A third of the public, 33 percent, think that gun laws should be kept the same, and only 7 percent believe that they should actually be made less strict.

■ **Figure 2:** Americans' views on the state of current gun laws and the need for new gun laws

### Gun Laws Should be More Strict

*In general, do you feel that the laws covering the sale of guns should be made more strict, less strict, or kept as they are now?*



- **Public continues to support common sense measures to cut down on illegal guns.** Americans, including most gun owners, overwhelmingly support several specific gun safety measures, most notably:

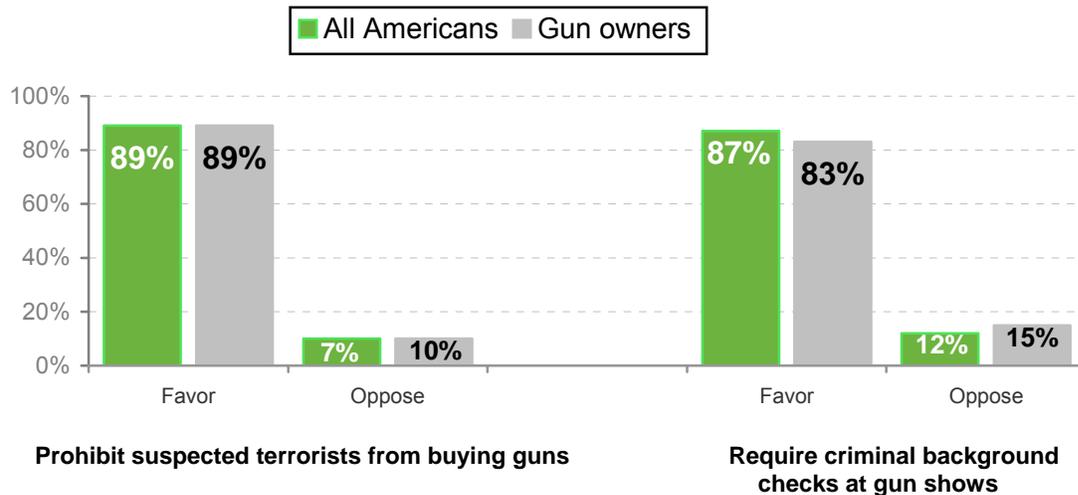
- Eighty-nine percent favor prohibiting people on the terrorist watch list from purchasing guns—including 89 percent of gun owners.
- Eighty-seven percent favor requiring everyone who sells guns at gun shows to conduct criminal background checks on the purchasers—as do 83 percent of gun owners.

*Other proposals with overwhelming support include:*

- Requiring gun retailers to perform background checks on their own employees (91 percent favor overall; including 88 percent of gun owners)
- Prohibiting gun retailers whose licenses have been revoked from continuing to sell their guns without a background check (80 percent favor overall; including 80 percent of gun owners)
- Requiring gun retailers to inspect their inventories every year to report stolen or missing guns (86 percent favor overall; including 83 percent of gun owners)
- Requiring all gun owners to alert the police if their guns are lost or stolen (91 percent favor overall; including 88 percent of gun owners)
- See Appendix A for a full breakdown of every measure examined.
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- **Figure 3:** Support and opposition for prohibiting people on the terror watch list from buying guns and requiring all people who sell guns at gun shows to conduct criminal background checks (*All Americans and gun owners*)

### Americans Support Prohibiting Suspected Terrorists from Purchasing Guns and Closing the Gun Show Loophole



- **Support for some specific measures stretches across the political spectrum.** There is no political divide on closing the gun-show loophole or preventing gun sales to terror suspects. Eighty-five percent of John McCain’s supporters back closing the gun show loophole as do 89 percent of people who support Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton. Support among gun owners and Republicans is even stronger for prohibiting people on the terror watch list from purchasing guns—89 percent of gun owners support this, as do 94 percent of McCain supporters (as well as 86 percent of people supporting one of the Democratic candidates). In addition, more than 80 percent of both McCain and Democratic voters support other key measures, such as requiring background checks on all people who sell guns, requiring all gun retailers to inspect their own inventories, and requiring gun owners to alert the police when their gun is lost or stolen.
- **Support for common sense measures to cut down on illegal guns can help presidential candidates.** Large majorities of Americans say that they would be *more likely* to vote for a candidate who wants to close the gun show loophole (78 percent; including 45 percent who say it would make them *much more likely* to support that candidate). Likewise, Americans say that they would be *more likely* to vote for a candidate who wants to stop people on the terrorist watch list from purchasing guns (78 percent; including 46 percent who say it would make them *much more likely*). Other anti-illegal guns initiatives that make Americans more likely to support candidates include alerting the police whenever a gun is lost or stolen, increasing federal penalties for illegal gun trafficking, and allowing police to share and have access to trace data for guns used in crimes.

In light of the data indicating that Americans are more likely to vote for candidates who take specific positions in favor of stricter gun laws, it is important to note that most people are still in favor of protecting gun rights. Nearly seven in ten people (68 percent) say they would be

*more likely* to vote for a candidate who wants to protect the Second Amendment right to own guns.

Most Americans believe in the individual right to own guns, but they don't see that in conflict with the need to crack down on illegal guns, keep guns out of the hands of terrorists, and give police the tools they need to solve crimes. In fact, among people who say they are more likely to vote for a candidate who wants to protect Second Amendment rights, 80 percent also support prohibiting suspected terrorists from purchasing guns and 77 percent want to require all people who sell guns at gun shows to conduct criminal background checks.

This survey shows that many Americans overwhelmingly favor common sense measures to cut down on the prevalence of illegal guns in the country. While most Americans support gun rights, people view their support as compatible with targeting illegal guns and fighting gun violence.

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## About Greenberg Quinlan Rosner and The Tarrance Group

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**The Tarrance Group** is one of the most successful full-service polling and strategic research firms in the United States. Our clients include Republican political candidates, trade associations, and major corporations. Eight U.S. Senators, two Governors, and over thirty Members of Congress currently rely on The Tarrance Group for their research needs, as does Miller Brewing, Papa John's, and the American Society of Anesthesiologists. Read more about us at [www.tarrance.com](http://www.tarrance.com).

## Appendix A

■ **Figure 4:** Americans' views on the state of current gun laws and the need for new gun laws

