

## Amid concern over spread of gun violence, majorities support ban on handguns, assault weapons

*Opposition to ban on firearms driven largely by men, rural Canadians, gun owners*

**May 24, 2019** –. Whether it's recent mass killings in Penticton, B.C., ongoing gang-related shootings in Toronto, or the Quebec City mosque killings in 2017, communities across the country have been shaken by gun violence in recent years.

The latest public opinion study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians divided by gender, gun ownership and region on the seriousness of gun-related crimes.

Across the country, half of Canadians (50%) consider gun violence a serious problem for the country, while half say political and media coverage of this issue has been overblown.

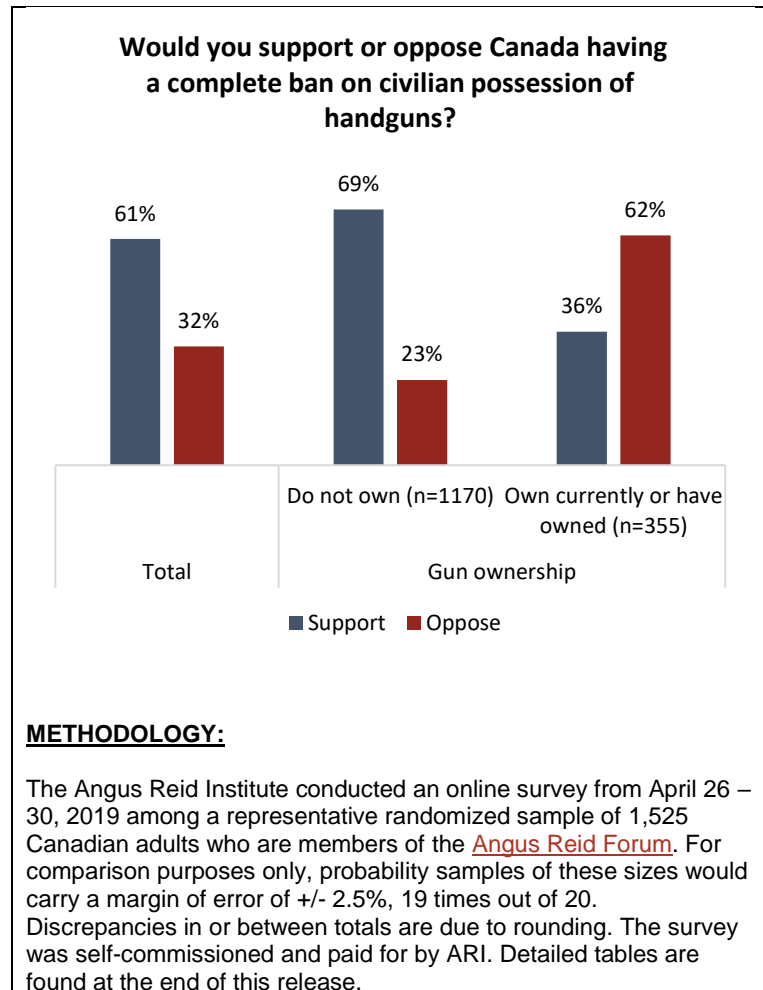
Concern over this issue is greatest in Ontario, where gang violence has contributed to [stark increases](#) in gun-related homicides.

Canadians appear to come to more consensus, regarding proposed policy responses. Six-in-ten Canadians (61%) say they would support an outright ban on civilian possession of handguns – something being pushed for [by some of the country's largest cities](#). The support level jumps to three-quarters (75%) when considering a ban on assault weapons.

Further, there is significant support for proposals to strengthen elements of the licensing and purchase process, including expanded background checks and comprehensive tracking of gun sale records. This includes majority support from current and former gun owners.

### More Key Findings:

- Some of the Angus Reid Institute's findings are at odds with those recently released from an online survey by the Government of Canada. While the government survey found close to four-in-five Canadians saying they did not believe more should be done to limit access to handguns or assault weapons, ARI found nearly the opposite. Important methodological differences explain this and are discussed later in the report



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- Rural and urban respondents have very different concerns about gun violence. For those in Canadian cities, the biggest identified worry relates to gang activity (48% say this). Rural Canadians, by contrast, voice higher levels of concern about accidental shootings or guns used for suicide than those in urban areas
- Those with more self-professed knowledge of Canada's gun laws are more comfortable with the current procedure for acquiring a license and firearm. This group is also more likely to say Canadian gun laws overall are too strict – 37 per cent say this. Those with no knowledge are nearly three-times as likely to say the laws are not strict enough compared to the most well-informed (54% to 20%)
- Canadians are divided about what a handgun ban would mean for the black market. Half (46%) say it would not make guns more difficult for criminals to obtain, while half (48%) say it would
- Two-thirds of Canadians (65%) say they would support a taxpayer funded buy-back program for gun owners if the government did, indeed, ban handguns, assault weapons, or both

### **About ARI**

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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- What about an all-out ban on handguns or assault weapons?
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## Part One: Exposure and Concern

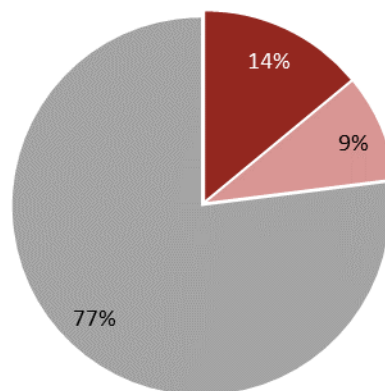
### How many own guns?

For many Canadians, discussions of gun laws and regulations often occur in the abstract. Many are affected by mass shootings both in Canada and the United States, but guns are a significantly smaller part of Canada's fabric than that of our neighbours to the south. Indeed, the Canadian gun ownership rate per 100 citizens is [one-quarter](#) that of the United States.

Nonetheless, guns, gun violence, and gun regulations carry importance in Canadian discussions for anyone concerned with the safety of the nation's citizens. To understand the landscape in this country, consider a few datapoints.

Among respondents to this ARI survey, one-in-seven (14%) Canadians say they currently own a gun, while slightly fewer say they have owned one in the past but do not currently. Three-quarters of Canadians (77%) have never owned a gun.

**Have you ever personally owned a gun?  
(All respondents)**



- Yes, currently own a gun(s)
- Have owned a gun(s) in the past but not currently
- No, never owned a gun

Gun ownership statistics have been historically difficult to pinpoint in this country. The RCMP, Canadian Shooting Sports Association, and Canadian Unlicensed Firearms Owners Association (CUFOA) all [suggest different estimates](#).

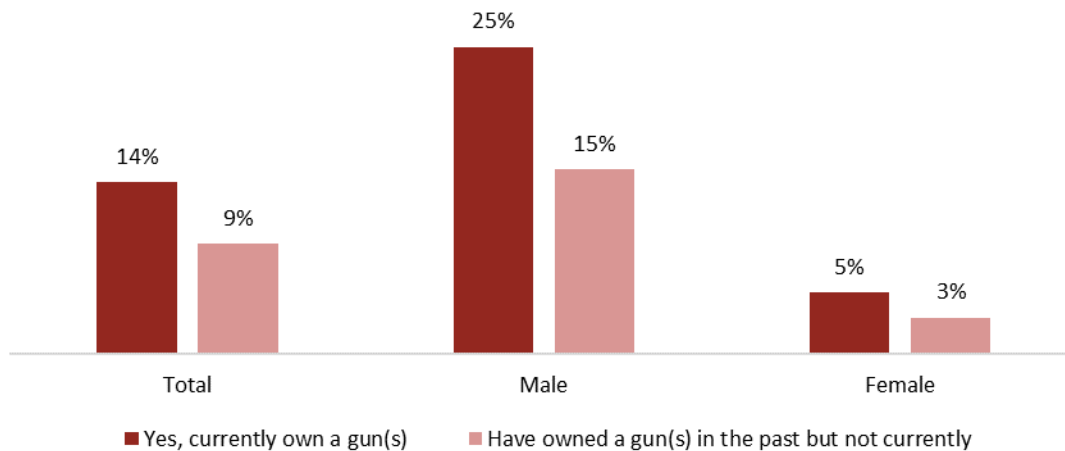
In Canada, gun ownership appears to be an overwhelmingly male pursuit. Four-in-ten men (40%) say they have owned a gun at some point in their lives. Women are five times less likely to say this:

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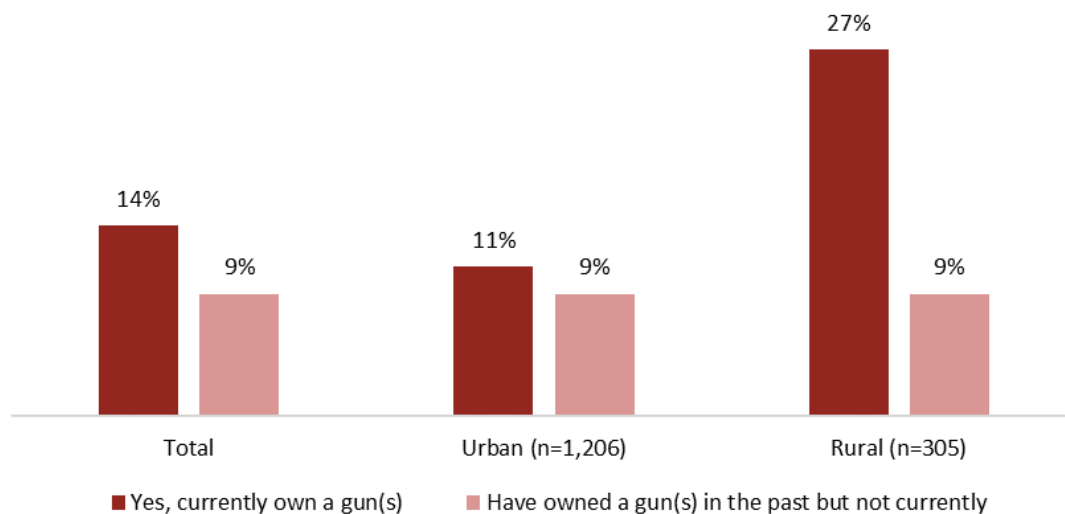
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**Have you ever personally owned a gun?  
(All respondents)**



Ownership is also considerably higher among rural residents in Canada than in urban centres. This is likely explained by the increased use of guns for hunting in rural areas. Indeed, among those who own a gun, 91 per cent say they are rifle owners (see comprehensive tables for more detail).

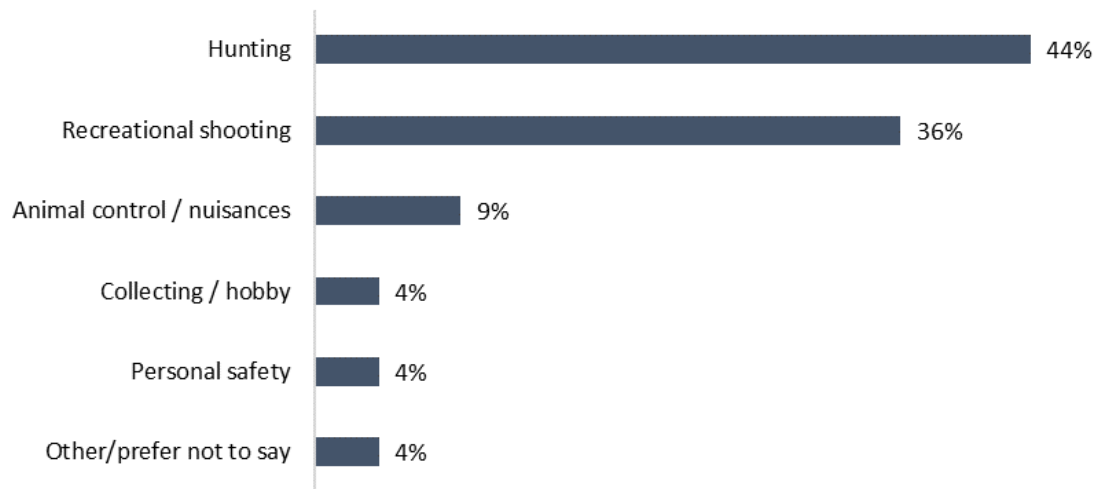
**Gun ownership by Urban vs Rural**



**Purposes for gun ownership**

Among those who say they have owned a gun in the past or do currently, there are two primary purposes for ownership: hunting (44%) or recreational shooting (36%). Very few Canadian gun owners (4%) say they have pursued ownership for personal safety:

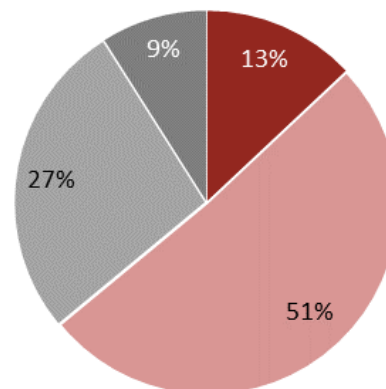
**Primary purpose for those who own or have owned a gun in Canada  
Among current or past gun owners, n=355**



While many Canadians are not gun owners, most say they're surrounded by people who are. One-in-eight (13%) say someone in their home owns a gun, while half (51%) are related to or a friend of someone who does:

**And, even if you do not personally own a gun, do you have any friends  
or close family members who are gun owners?  
(All respondents)**

- Yes, someone else in my household owns a gun
- Yes, a close friend or family member (outside of my household)
- No
- Not sure / can't say



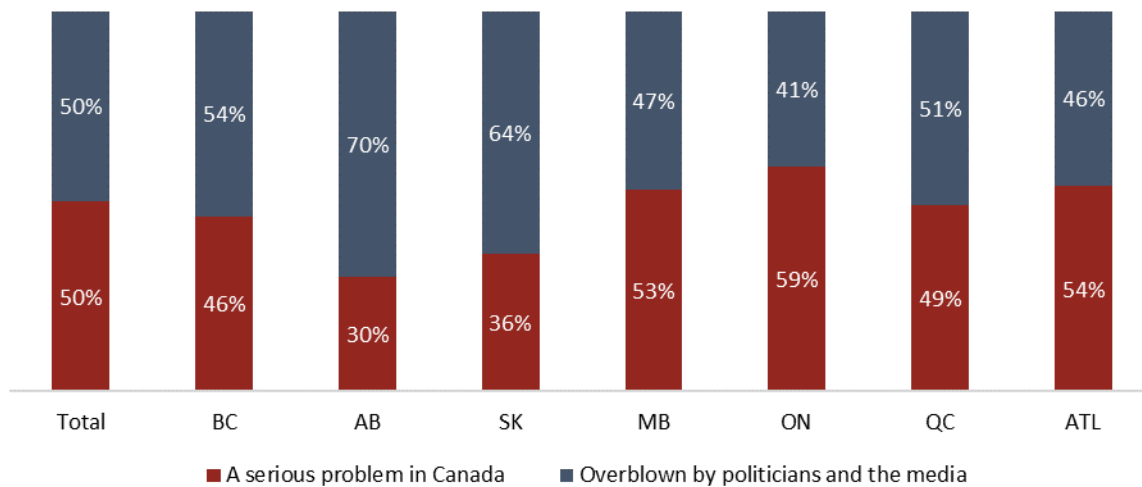
**Part Two: Canadian Communities and Concerns**

**Half say gun violence is a serious problem, half disagree**

The threat of gun violence is a subject up for debate in Canada. Asked if gun violence is a serious problem in this country or something that has been overblown by politicians and the media, Canadians are divided equally on both sides of this statement.

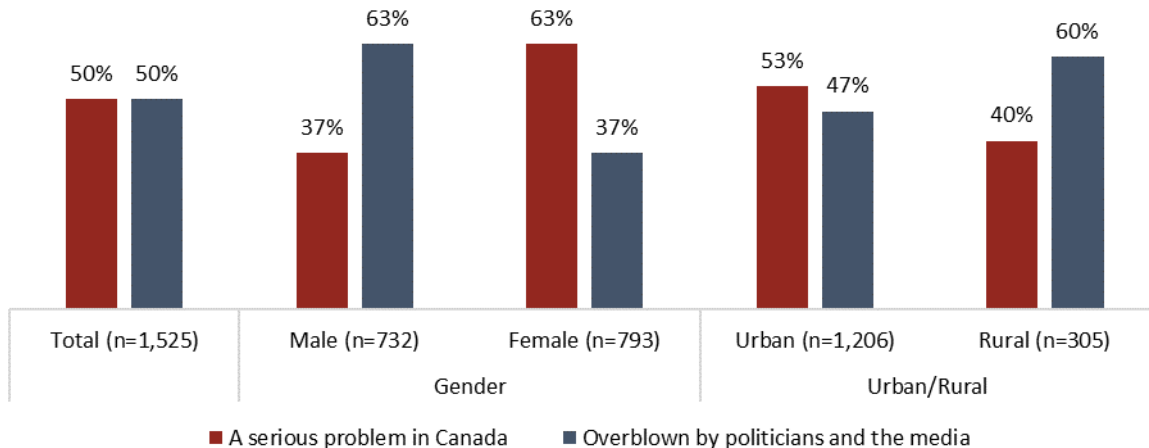
There are, however, significant regional distinctions. A majority of residents in Ontario, Atlantic Canada and Manitoba say they believe the problem is serious, while residents of the other regions lean the opposite way or are divided close to evenly.

**Thinking about gun violence now, is this a serious problem in Canada, or something you think is overblown by politicians and the media?  
(All respondents)**



Sentiments on this faceoff statement also diverge significantly by gender and whether or not a respondent is living in an urban or rural area:

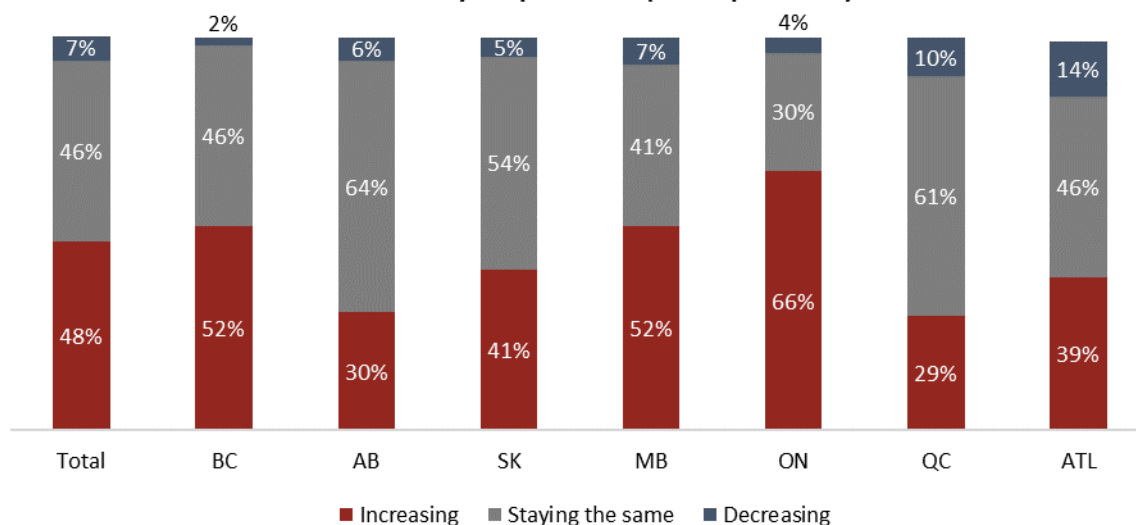
**Thinking about gun violence now, is this a serious problem in Canada, or something you think is overblown by politicians and the media?**



**Gun violence seen as increasing by half in Ontario**

Empirical evidence shows gun crime is rising. In 2017, firearm related violence hit a 25-year high nationally, with 7,500 incidents of violent crime involving that type of weapon reported to police. In Ontario, where the country’s largest city broke records for gun violence in 2018, residents are most likely to say that this type of violence is increasing – two-thirds do so (66%). British Columbia and Manitoba are the other provinces where a majority hold this opinion. Notably, just seven per cent of Canadians say gun violence is decreasing in their province:

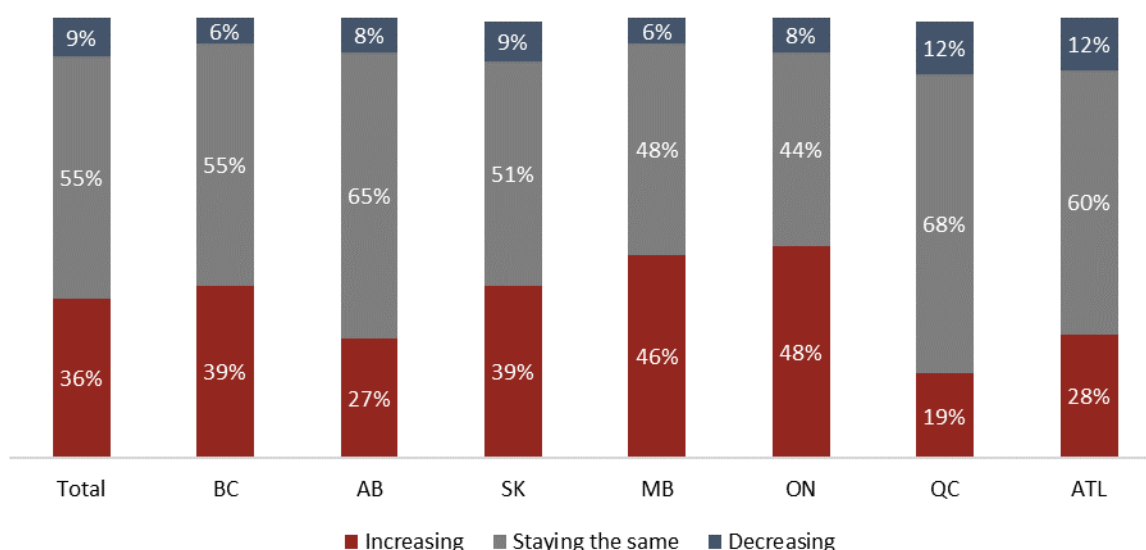
**Would you say that gun violence has been increasing, decreasing or staying the same in your province? (All respondents)**



It is worth noting that, while more firearm-related homicides take place in urban areas as an absolute number, due to the population concentration, the *rate* of such incidents is actually 16% higher in rural areas, according to [2017 Statistics Canada](#) data.

Canadians are less likely to believe that gun violence is increasing in their immediate community – the proportion drops from half (48%) provincially to one-third (36%) at the community level. That said, nearly half of residents in Manitoba and Ontario say their communities are becoming more violent:

**Would you say that gun violence has been increasing, decreasing or staying the same in your community? (All respondents)**



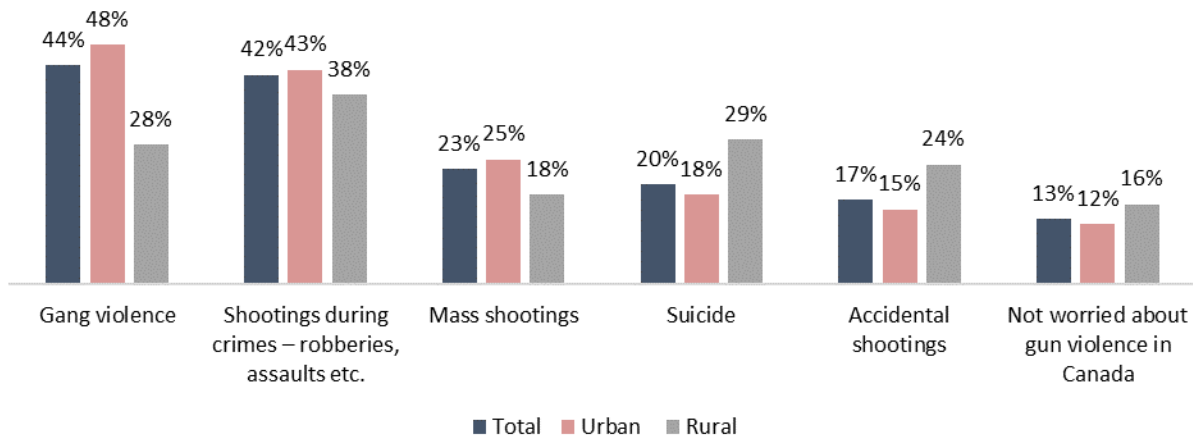
**Different concerns for rural and urban Canadians**

While many Canadians have concerns about gun-related violence, these priorities tend to differ based on the part of the country in which one lives. For example, the top concern for Canadians overall is gang violence, but this is driven by half of urban Canadians (48%) choosing this option, compared to three-in-ten rural Canadians (28%). Shootings that may occur during other crimes, such as robberies or assaults, are second on the list and close to equally prioritised by urban and rural Canadians.

Notably, with their increased levels of gun ownership for hunting and recreation purposes, rural residents express more concern than urban Canadians when considering the possibility of firearms being used to commit suicide or for someone being involved in an accidental shooting:



**Thinking about your own community, which, if any, are of the greatest concern to you? (Respondents allowed two choices)**



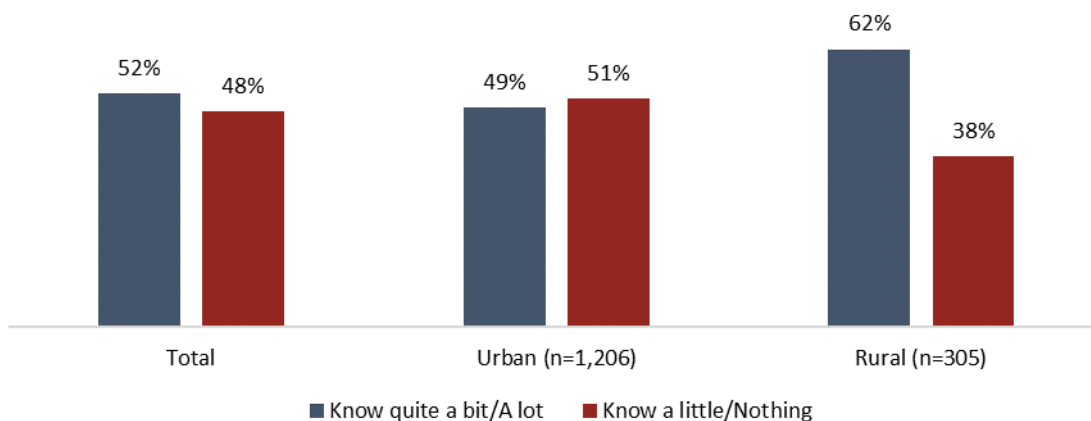
**Part Three: Regulation and Policies around gun control**

**Canadian knowledge and assessment of gun regulations**

Before canvassing views from respondents about gun regulations in more detail, Canadians were first asked about their current level of understanding of “the laws and regulations around owning and storing guns in Canada” as they began this survey ([view questionnaire here](#)).

Half of Canadians (52%) say they feel they know the laws at least quite well, while the other half (48%) say they know a little or nothing at all. Rural residents said they feel more comfortable with their knowledge of the laws and regulations than urban residents:

**Overall, how well – if at all - would you say you know and understand the laws and regulations around owning and storing guns in Canada.**



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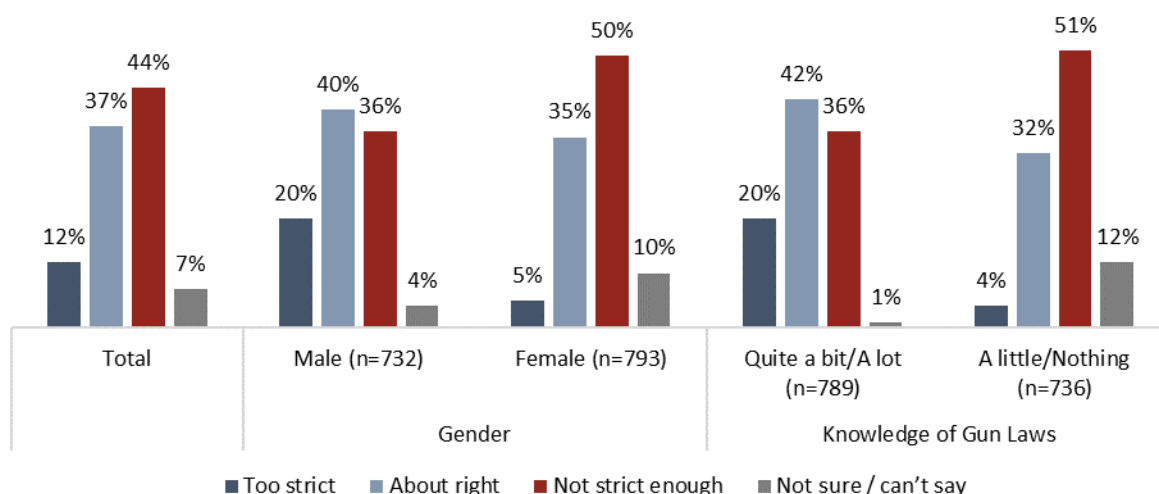
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### **Four-in-ten say gun laws not strict enough**

Views on the current composition of gun laws and regulations are varied. Overall, just one-in-ten Canadians (12%) believe gun laws are too strict, but this almost doubles among those who say they are more informed about the laws (20%). A majority of those who are less informed (51%) say the laws are not strict enough.

Men are four times more likely than women (20% vs. 5%) to say gun laws are too strict currently, while women are much more likely to say they should in fact be strengthened:

**Would you say, the current gun laws in Canada are too strict, not strict enough, or about right? (All respondents)**



### **Most satisfied with process to purchase a firearm**

As part of the survey questionnaire, the Angus Reid Institute presented Canadians with some basic knowledge about gun control in Canada. First, respondents were given a description of the three classes of firearms in Canada – non-restricted, restricted, and prohibited, and shown images of some guns in each category. The Institute then presented respondents with the general steps required to legally possess a non-restricted gun in Canada.

For example, an applicant must complete the [Canadian Firearm Safety Course](#), apply for a Possession Acquisition License (PAL) and agree to a personal background check extending five years back. There is also a 28-day mandatory waiting period between the time someone applies for a PAL and the time they can receive it.

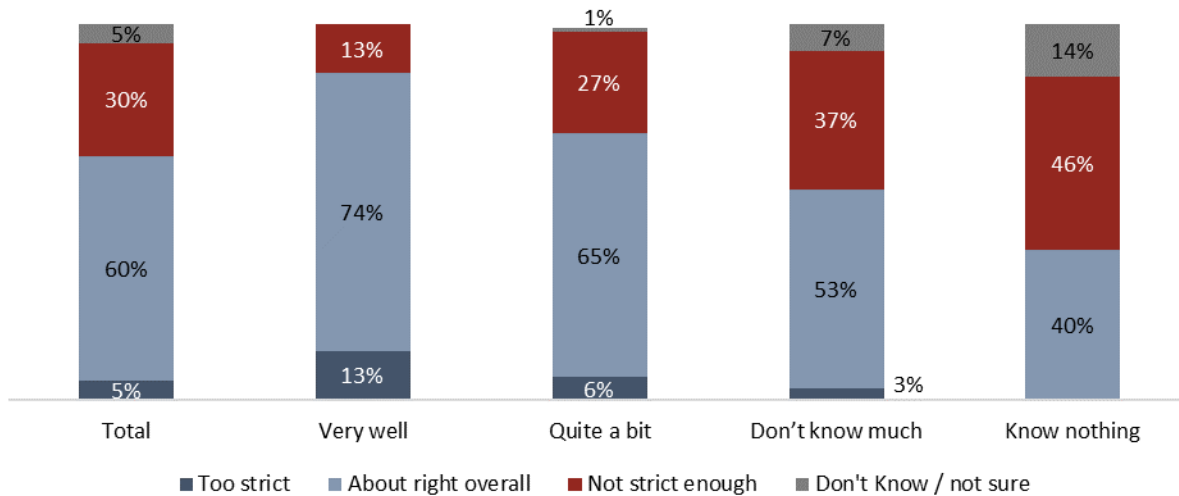
Overall, after considering these steps, six-in-ten Canadians say this process is about right (60%), in terms of its strictness. Three-in-ten Canadians (30%), however, say the process is not strict enough.

Notably, those reporting a high pre-existing knowledge of gun laws are much more likely to say the laws strike the right balance – three-in-four (74%) do so. As self-assessed knowledge decreases, the desire for stricter laws increases:

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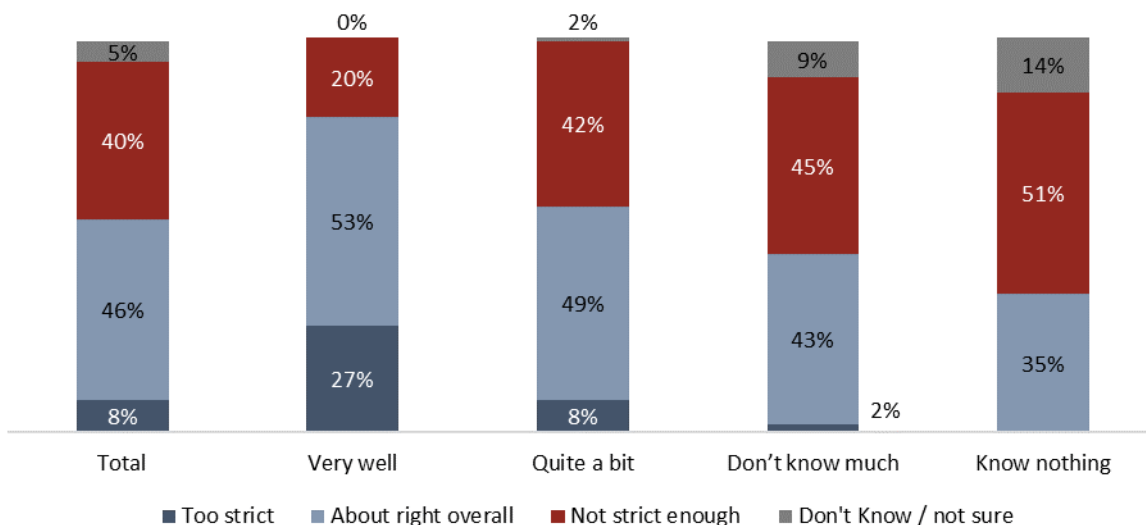
**When thinking about the process to legally possess a non-restricted gun in Canada, would you say it is.... (All respondents)**



In terms of the process required to possess a restricted firearm ([view questionnaire](#)), the percentage of Canadians saying it should be more stringent rises. 46 per cent now say this, compared to three-in-ten (30%) on the previous question.

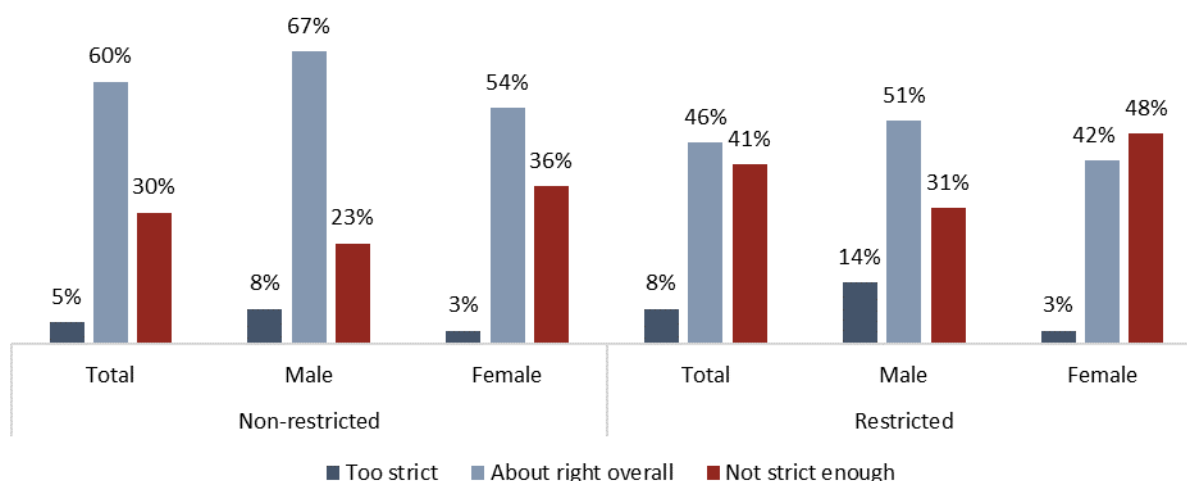
Again, the percentage of Canadians saying they would like to see stricter regulations rises the less people knew about the subject:

**When thinking about the process to legally possess a restricted gun in Canada, would you say it is.... (All respondents)**



On both of these questions, women are more likely to say they would like to see stricter regulations, and men are more likely to say they would like to see less.

**When thinking about the process to legally possess a non-restricted or restricted gun in Canada, would you say it is.... (All respondents)**



**Part Four: Proposed changes**

**Handgun, assault weapon ban – a story of two surveys**

Despite the fact that a majority of Canadians generally approve of current gun control regulations, broad opinion that more can be done to prevent access to weapons that are outside of the non-restricted category also exists. Consider these two questions which were offered before any specific gun-related issues were discussed.

“In your opinion, here in Canada, should more be done to limit access to handguns?” The same question was also asked about assault weapons. Note that “assault weapon” is not currently a term with a legal definition in Canada, however in its recent research the federal government [describes this type of weapon as](#) “semi-automatic firearms with a large magazine of ammunition that were designed and configured for rapid fire.”

This language used by ARI mirrors that of a Government of Canada survey on this topic, the results of which were [recently released](#). The outcomes of the two surveys, however, are noticeably different, largely explained by the methodologies used.

The Angus Reid Institute survey was taken by 1,525 respondents across the country and is proportionally representative of Canadians from each region of the country. The data is also weighted to 2016 Census proportions for demographics such as age, gender, education and income level etc., to ensure the responses accurately reflect public opinion.

The Government of Canada survey was taken by a much larger sample, with [134,917 total responses](#). Anyone was invited to take part in the survey, and as such, demographic bases tend not to reflect an approximately representative population sample. For example, 61 per cent of respondents identified as

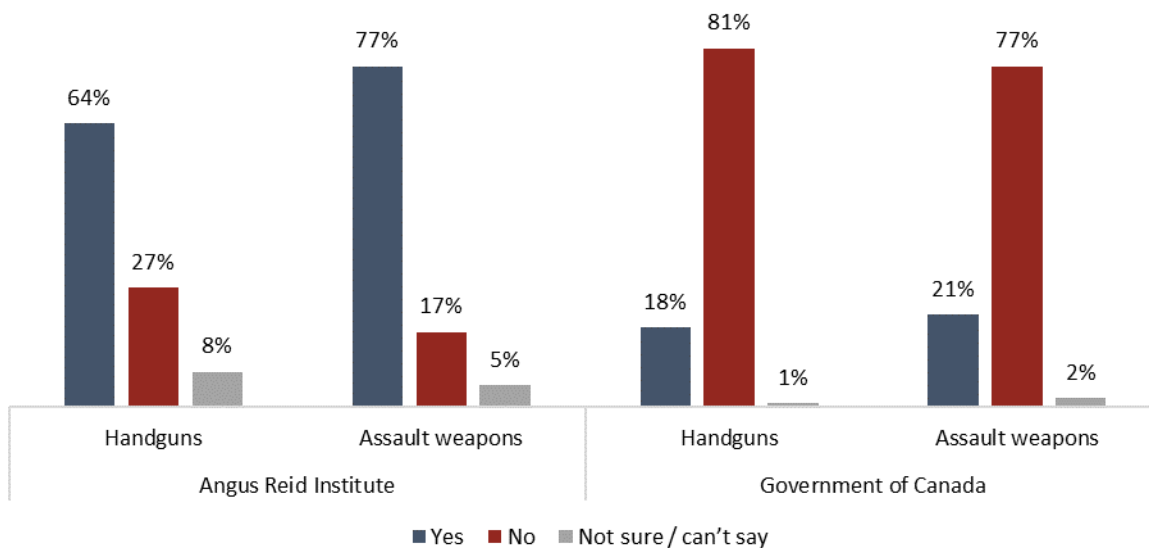
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male – 11.5 percentage points above census levels. The percentage identifying as female was 30 per cent, a full 20 points lower than the population average.

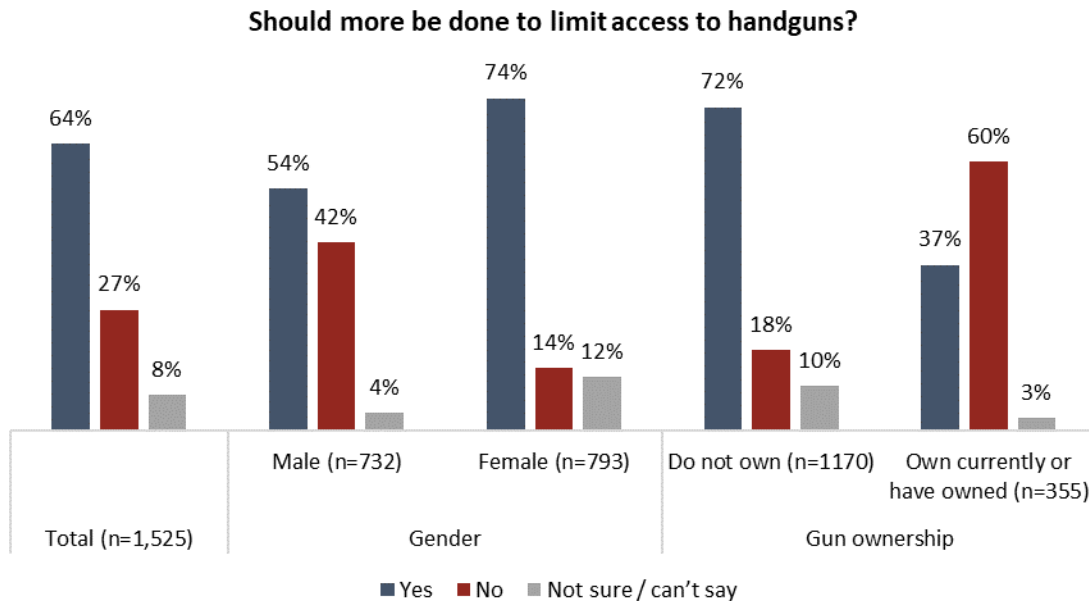
The government survey also placed no limits on how many times a person could fill out the survey. One Quebec resident claimed to have used software to send [more than 25,000 responses](#) during the survey window. For these reasons, among others, the two identical questions yield wildly disparate responses.

**Should more be done to limit access to each type of firearm**



Responses to this question in the ARI survey vary across different populations. For example, ensuring equal responses from women in Canada yields much more support for measures to limit access to handguns, with three-quarters of female respondents wanting more action on this file (73%). Conversely, those who currently own guns are significantly more likely to say that nothing needs to be done compared to non-owners.

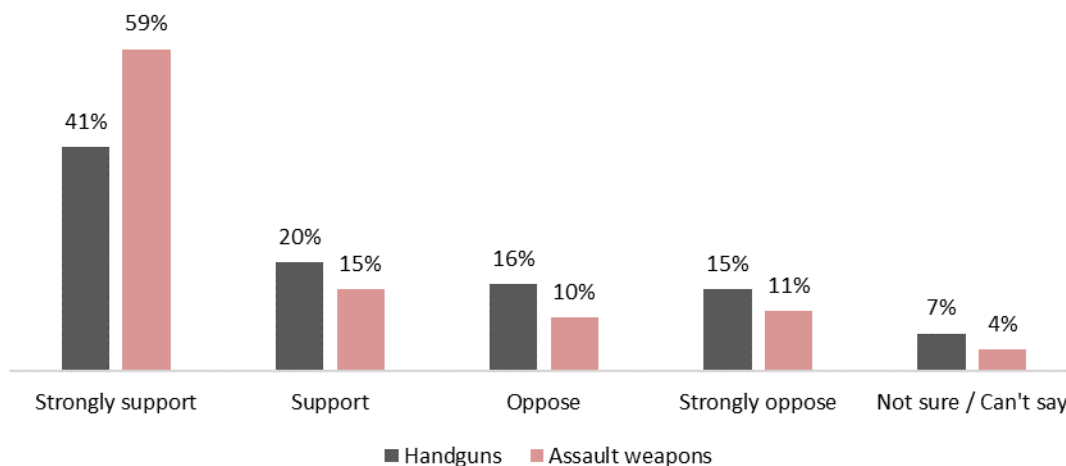
That said, none of these groups come close to the four-in-five level of opposition to action on limiting access to each type of firearm found in the government survey:



In producing its report on gun control, the federal government engaged in in-person consultations, accepted written submissions, and operated the online questionnaire mentioned above. Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction Minister Bill Blair said the government has not decided whether or not to pursue a ban on handguns, which gun ownership advocates say will only punish legal gun owners, and not help to quell the violence from those who use firearms illegally.

That said, on the question of whether or not each type of firearm should be banned, a firm majority of Canadians point the government toward a ban. Twice as many Canadians support rather than oppose a ban on handgun ownership among civilians, and the ratio expands to more than three-to-one when considering assault weapons:

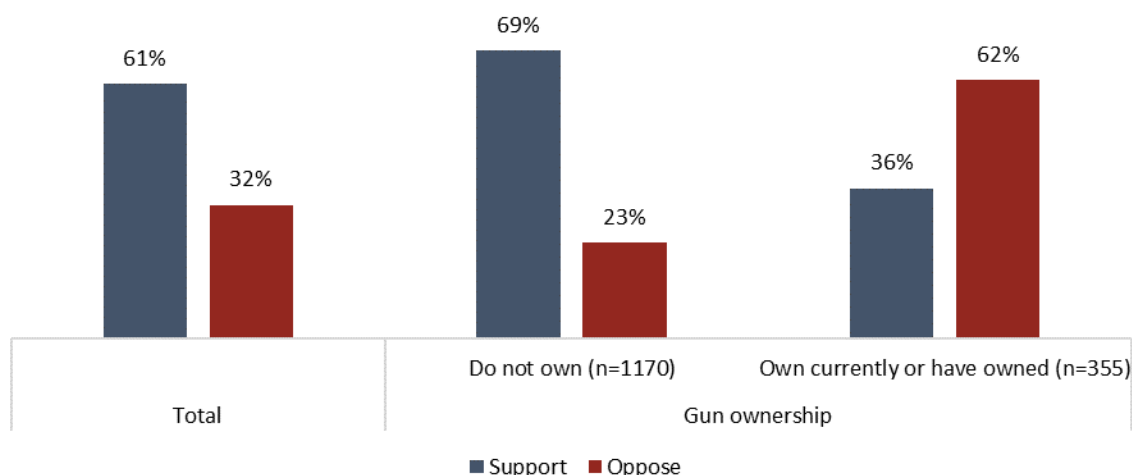
**Would you support or oppose Canada having a complete ban on civilian possession of each of the following...  
(All respondents)**



**Handgun Ban**

Responses to this line of questioning diverge significantly based on gun ownership. Seven-in-ten non-owners (69%) say they support the handgun ban, while six-in-ten current or past owners oppose it:

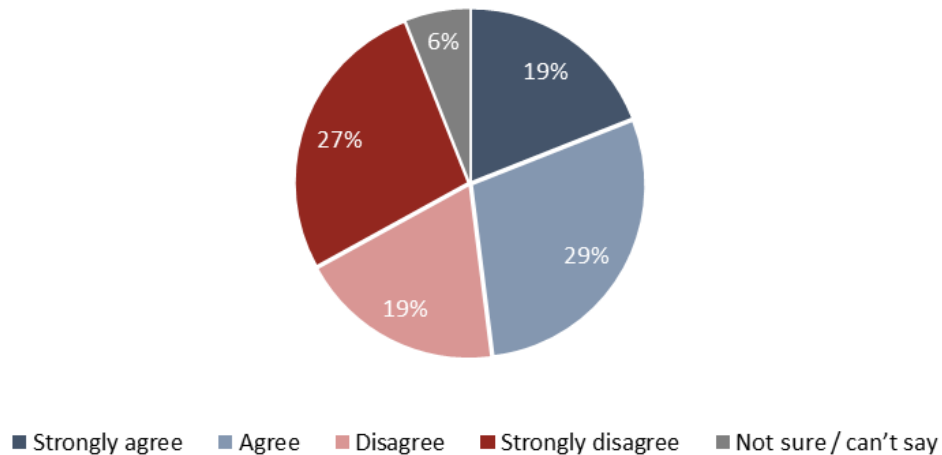
**Would you support or oppose Canada having a complete ban on civilian possession of handguns?**



Some of this opposition among the one-third (32%) who disagree with such a policy may be explained by skepticism that the goal of remove guns from the hands of those who would harm others will not be

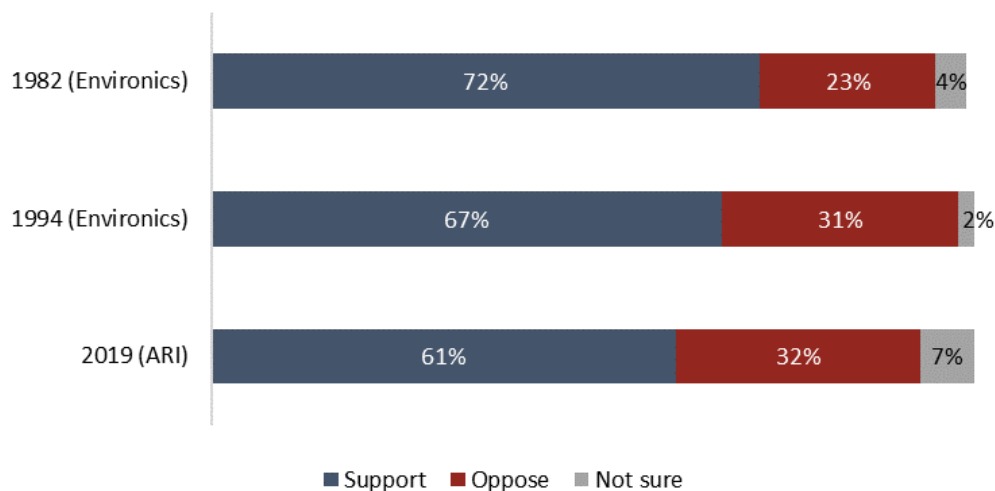
achieved with a blanket ban. Half of Canadians (46%) say they do not believe a ban on guns will make it more difficult for criminals to continue to access them:

**Agree vs. Disagree "A ban on guns would make it more difficult for criminals to get their hands on them"  
(All respondents)**



The federal government has suggested a polarization among the Canadian population when considering a ban on handguns. While support for a ban appears to outpace opposition by two-to-one, it is worth noting that support has been slowly diminishing across the last number of decades, as seen in the graph below:

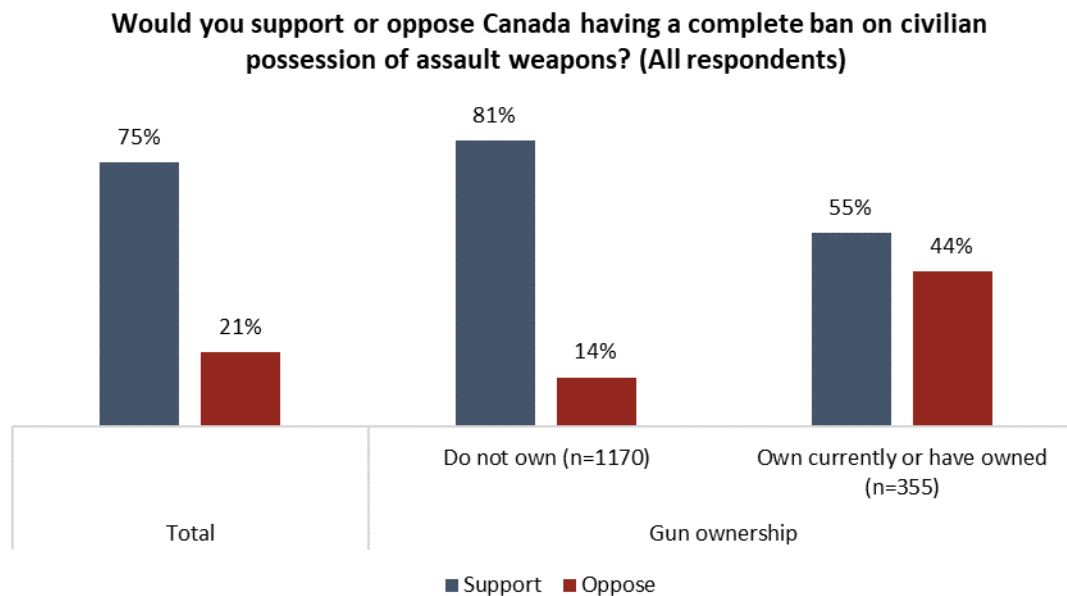
**Support vs Oppose a ban on civilian handgun ownership**





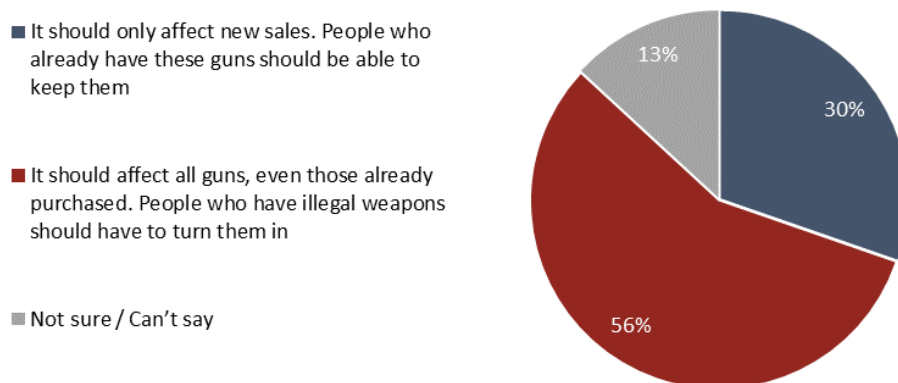
**Assault weapon ban**

It would appear that a slim majority of gun owners draw a line in the sand when it comes to ownership of assault weapons among the civilian population. Just over half (55%) support a ban among this group, while non-owners are overwhelmingly supportive:



If, indeed, a ban on these firearms is introduced in the future, most Canadians do not believe that it should be grandfathered. That is, 56 per cent say that a ban should immediately affect all gun owners, regardless of when they purchased the firearm(s). Three-in-ten (30%) support a grandfather clause which would allow people who already have these guns to keep them:

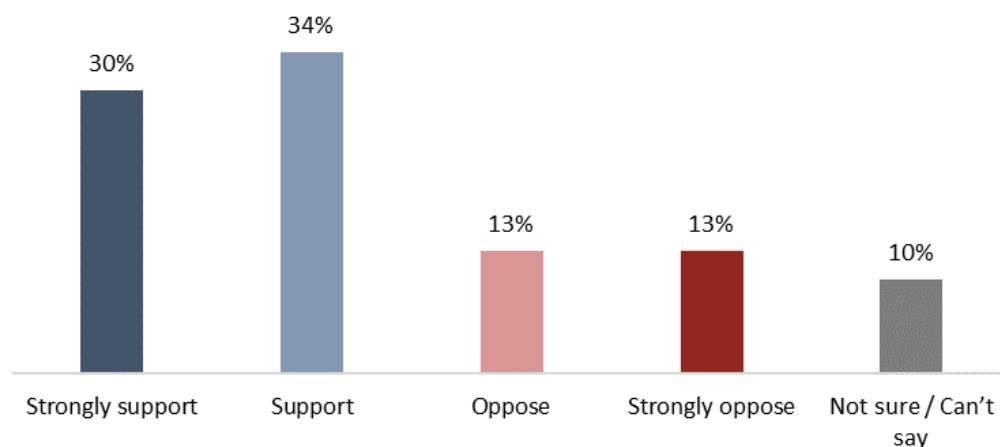
**Which statement best reflects how you think such a ban on handguns or assault weapons should be applied?  
(All respondents)**



One of the ways governments may implement a firearm ban is through a buy-back program. This is when municipal, provincial and/or federal governments offer financial incentives to turn in guns, which are then destroyed. Cities all over the United States have [offered this type of option](#) for legal guns, with varying degrees of success. In Australia, after a mass shooting in 1996, the federal government implemented a [mandatory buy-back program](#), and collected more than 650,000 guns.

For their part, Canadians would be willing to support such an endeavour with their own wallets. Two-thirds (65%) say that they would welcome a gun buy-back program, knowing that it would be funded by taxpayers:

**Would you support or oppose this type of program, knowing it would be funded by taxpayers? (All respondents)**

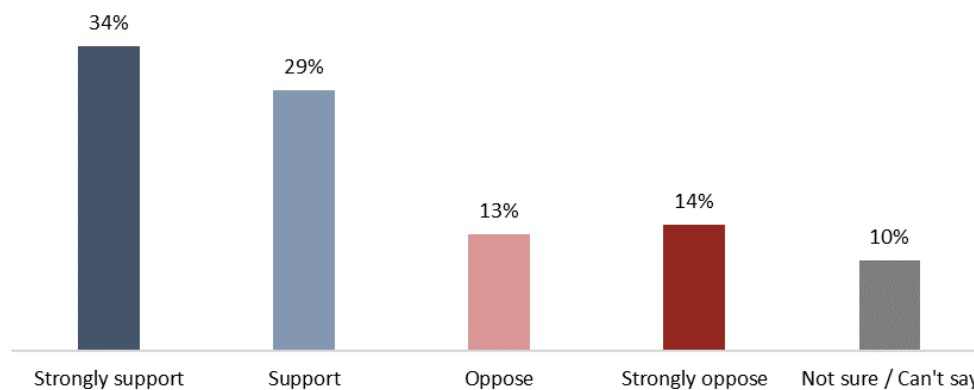


**Support for individual elements of Bill C-71**

The federal Liberal [government introduced Bill C-71 last year](#), which included a number of proposed changes to gun regulations. One example would be lengthening background check periods from the current five-year limit to include a prospective gun owners' entire personal history.

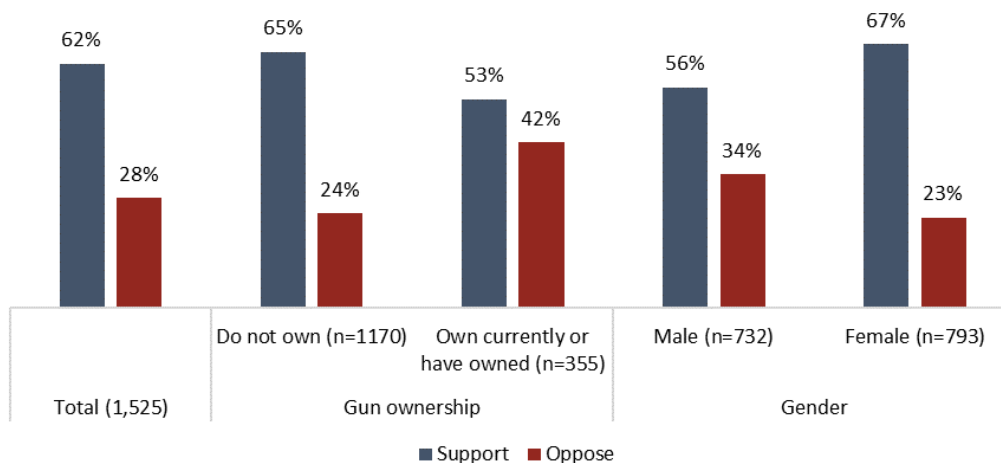
Such a proposal is widely supported by Canadians, with six-in-ten (63%) saying they are in favour and three-in-ten in opposition (28%).

**Do you support or oppose removing the five-year limit from the mandatory background checks for firearm licenses? (All respondents)**



Gun owners, past and present, are less likely to support this measure, but a majority still do. Women are also more supportive than men.

**Do you support or oppose removing the five-year limit from the mandatory background checks for firearm licenses?**

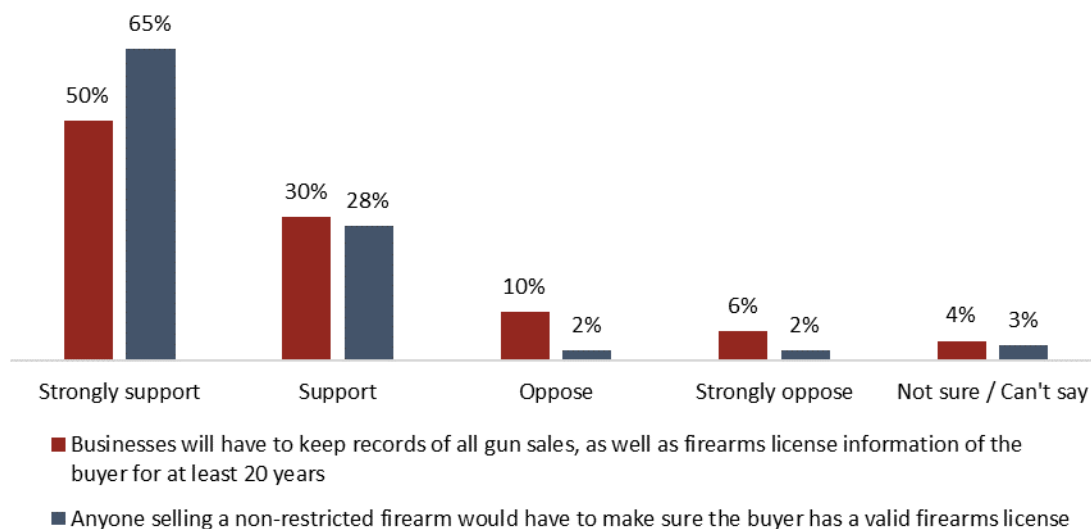


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Two other elements of the bill generate higher support and less opposition. One would require gun retailers to keep records of their sales and then inventory the purchase, while the other would require the purchaser to present a firearms licence and have the seller ensure that the license is valid.

**Support or oppose each measure of Bill C-71  
(All respondents)**



### **Political Considerations**

The gun control issue in Canada has often been politically volatile, with recent federal governments vacillating on elements of regulation – most prominently, the [long gun registry](#). That program, which required gun owners to register non-restricted firearms, was enacted by the Chretien Liberal government in 1995 and abolished in 2012 under the Conservative majority of Stephen Harper. Some have called the new Bill C-71 measure discussed above to create stricter measures for record keeping a “[back door gun registry](#)”, and Conservatives have opposed such changes.

Conservatives in Ottawa have not always been opposed to increased gun control measures, however. After the Ecole Polytechnique Massacre in 1989, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney implemented [a number of gun control measures](#), including the limiting of magazine capacity for weapons.

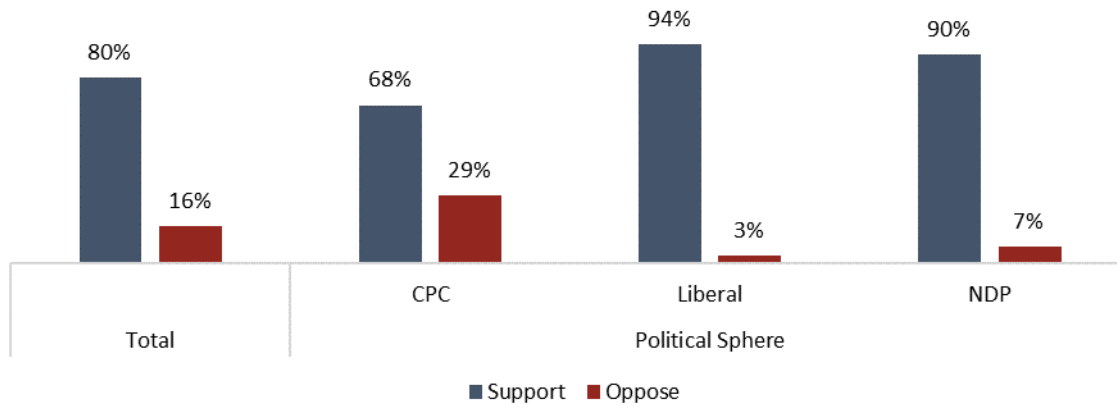
While opposition to stricter record keeping is certainly higher among those considering the Conservative Party in the coming election (see political sphere methodology at end of report), support still reaches seven-in-ten (68%) among this group, and is near unanimous elsewhere:

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#### **CONTACT:**

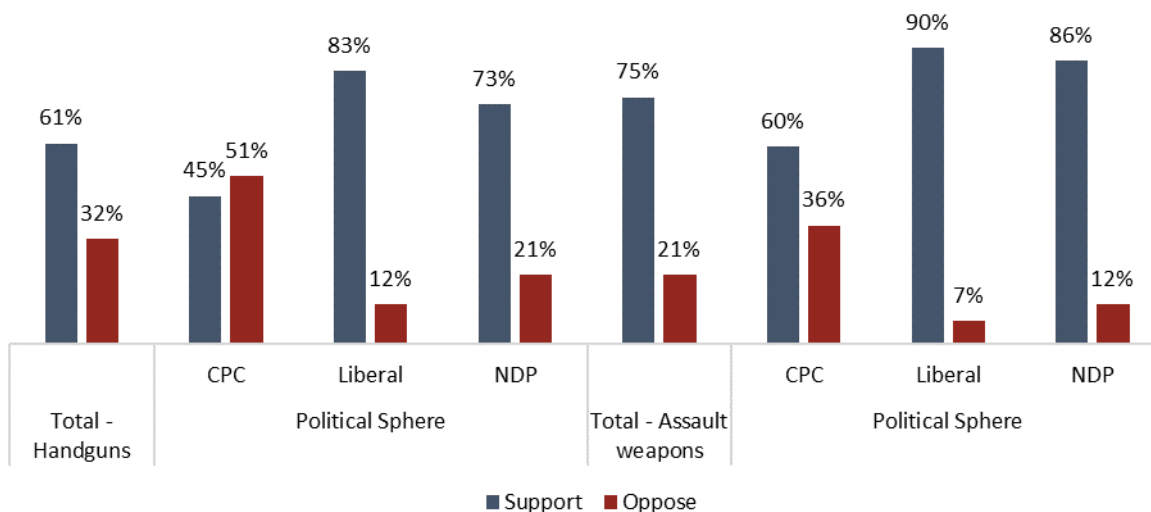
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**Support vs Oppose "Businesses will have to keep records of all gun sales, as well as firearms license information of the buyer for at least 20 years"  
(All respondents)**



The sentiment that civilian possession of handguns should be banned is more divisive. While overwhelming majorities of those considering the Liberal Party or NDP are supportive of such a ban, those in the Conservative political sphere are inclined to lean toward opposition. That is not the case for a ban on assault weapons, wherein support trumps opposition by a significant margin:

**Support vs Oppose a ban on civilian possession of each:  
(All respondents)**



**Political Sphere Methodology**

Rather than rely on respondents' potentially faded memories regarding their vote in the 2015 federal election, ARI researchers constructed a measure of political partisanship based on willingness to vote for the main federal parties in a future election under their current leaders.

The question specifically asked respondents how likely they would be to vote for “The Liberal Party led by Justin Trudeau,” “The Conservative Party led by Andrew Scheer,” and “The New Democratic Party led by Jagmeet Singh” in a future election. The response options were “definitely support” the party and leader in question, “certainly consider” them, “maybe consider” them, and “definitely not even consider” them.

Respondents choosing either of the first two options (definitely support or certainly consider) are considered to be a party’s “sphere.” They represent potential supporters of that party, not necessarily decided voters.

It should be noted that the categories are not mutually exclusive. Respondents were asked to give an opinion on each of the main parties and had the option to say they would “certainly consider” each one.

Thus, many respondents may appear in the spheres of multiple parties.

***For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, click [here](#).***

***For detailed results by familiarity with gun laws, federal political spheres, urban-rural communities and other crosstabs, click [here](#).***

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