

 DATA FOR *PROGRESS*

GUN VIOLENCE

Registered voters across the political spectrum support new, stronger laws for the purposes of curbing gun violence.

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LIFE > GUNS

Background:

In 2017, firearms killed 39,773 Americans, more than the population of Atlantic City.^{1,2} Despite this clear and overwhelming tragedy, the issue of guns is often called a “third rail” in American politics,³ with a dominant media narrative suggesting that the issue “divides” Americans.⁴ In a poll of registered voters (fielded September 13–16, 2019, by YouGov), we found that several gun-control policies are very popular with voters, with support shared across “the divide.” The survey was fielded on a sample of US registered voters, and was weighted to be representative of the US population of voters by age, race/ethnicity, sex, education, US Census region, and 2016 presidential vote choice. The survey sample size was 1,009 and the margin of error was +/-3.5 percent.

Implementation:

The survey introduces each policy with the following statement:

Recently, some lawmakers have proposed legislation to prevent gun violence. For each policy, indicate whether you support, oppose, or are unsure about the policy.

Those policies included:

- ▶ A policy banning assault weapons.
- ▶ A policy banning high-capacity magazines, which hold fifteen or more rounds.
- ▶ A policy banning 3D gun printers, which could be used to manufacture guns at home.
- ▶ A policy investing in community centers that provide educational opportunities and training to promote responsible gun ownership.

- ▶ A policy funding community intervention programs for those at risk of becoming involved with gun violence.
- ▶ A policy requiring all gun owners to be licensed and all guns to be registered.
- ▶ A mandatory gun buyback, where the government pays people to acquire all of their guns.
- ▶ A policy allowing guns to have identification systems so that only owner-approved users of the gun can fire it.
- ▶ A policy creating a voluntary gun buyback program, where the government pays people to acquire any guns they no longer want.

Major takeaways:

- ▶ A ban on assault weapons, a ban on high-capacity magazines, a ban on 3D-printed guns, and a voluntary gun buyback all have more than 65 percent support among the general public.
- ▶ Self-identified conservatives under the age of thirty generally support progressive legislation on guns.
- ▶ Sixty percent of respondents supported a policy requiring all gun owners to be licensed, with only 16 percent saying they were “strongly opposed.”
- ▶ A large, bipartisan majority of respondents (84 percent) supported a policy allocating funds to create community intervention programs.

Each of these policies, besides the mandatory gun buyback, enjoys overall net support among voters. All of these policies enjoyed net support among Democrats, as did all of the policies besides the mandatory buyback among independents. Voters across the partisan divide supported a voluntary buyback.

Some policies previously considered to be controversial, like the assault weapons ban, are overwhelmingly popular. The most popular policies centered around new community-based programs designed to promote responsible gun ownership, and designed to prevent at-risk youth from becoming involved in gun violence.

The following plot shows net support for each of these policies across the full sample, and broken out by party identification. Each cell plots the share of voters in each group supporting the policy minus the share opposing the policy. For example, overall, 66 percent of voters support the voluntary gun buyback, while 24 percent of voters oppose it, resulting in a net +42 percent net support in the top-left cell of this chart.

POLICIES:

Gun Licensing:

Notably, 72 percent of voters somewhat or strongly supported the idea of requiring all gun owners to be licensed, and all guns to be registered. Less than a quarter of voters oppose the policy. While similar surveys show there is robust support for background checks prior to gun purchases, these results suggest there is also support for requiring guns to be registered.

Researchers of gun violence say that requiring gun owners to possess a license is one of the most effective ways to stop gun violence.⁵ And as our poll shows, the policy is widely supported.

SUPPORT FOR GUN CONTROL POLICIES

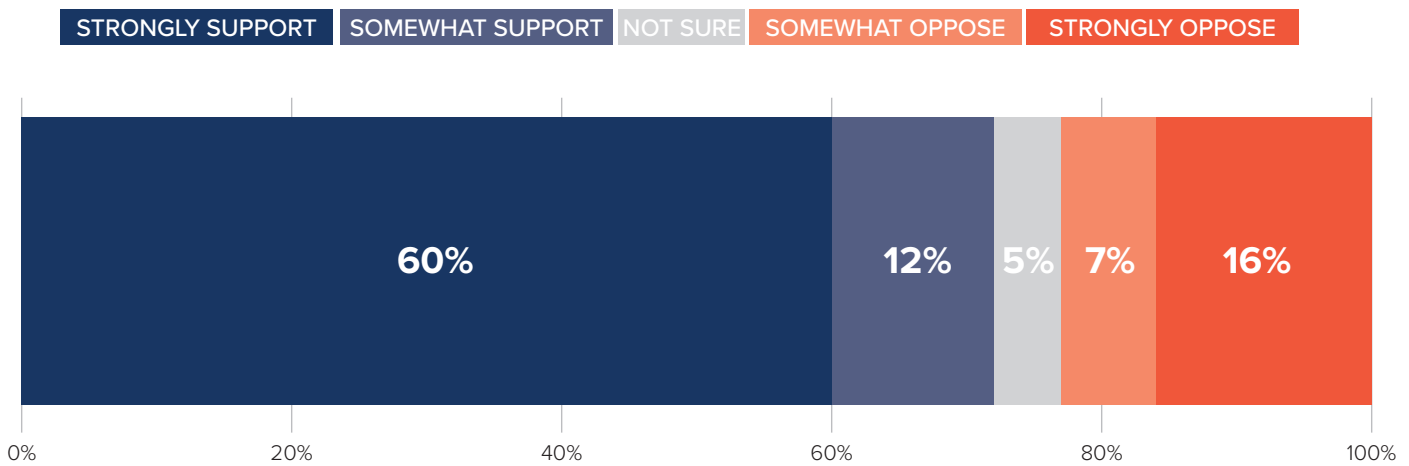
	-11% - -55%	-1% - -10%	0-14%	15-24%	25-34%	35-44%	45-54%	55-64%
	All	Democrat	Independent	Republican				
Voluntary gun buy-back	+42%	+80%	+28%	+65%				
Owner-approved gun ID systems	+36%	+71%	+28%	+2%				
Mandatory gun buy-back	-17%	+29%	-39%	-53%				
License gun owners and register guns	+48%	+85%	+39%	+17%				
Community intervention programs	+65%	+83%	+64%	+42%				
Community educational funding	+75%	+76%	+76%	+75%				
Banning 3D gun printers	+51%	+80%	+36%	+37%				
Ban high-capacity magazines	+41%	+84%	+30%	+7%				
Ban assault weapons	+36%	+84%	+25%	-5%				

Ninety-two percent of self-identified liberals supported a policy “requiring all gun owners to be licensed and all guns to be registered. A sizable majority of moderates (76 percent) also supported the policy, with only 16 percent opposed to it. Even among conservatives, we found respondents were virtually tied, with 49 percent supporting and 48 percent opposing. However, when looking at responses among young conservatives (those

under the age of thirty), support for the policy jumps to 68 percent and opposition drops to 41 percent. Heavy support for the policy was also found even when the respondents were broken up by where they lived (rural areas, towns, suburbs, cities).

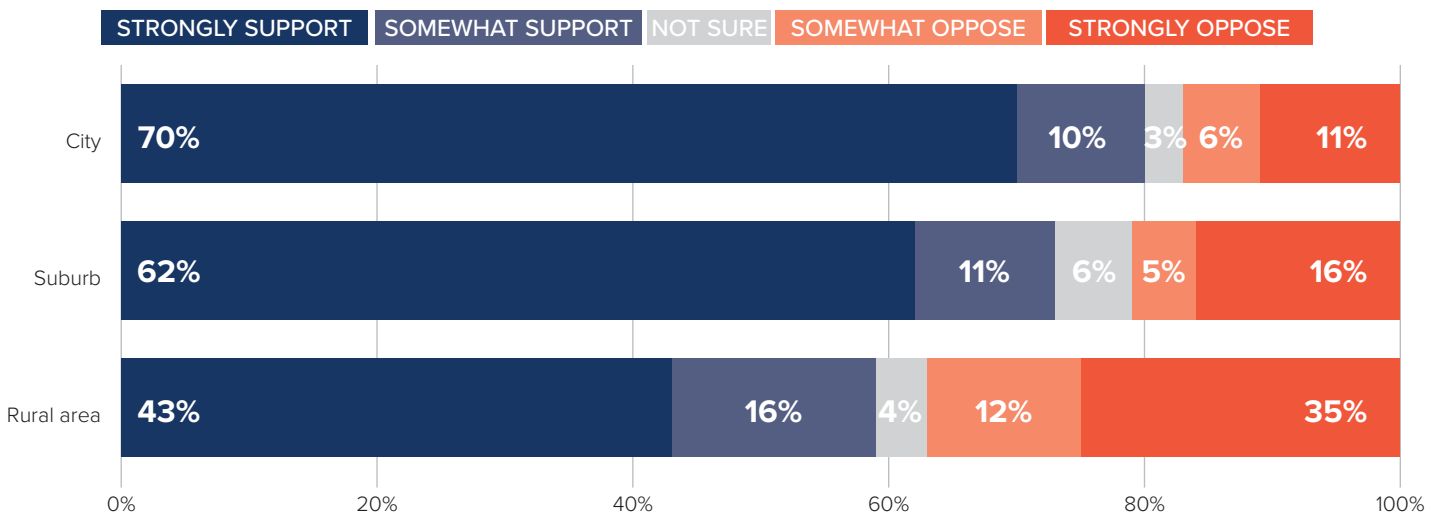
If a candidate wants a policy with a broad consensus and with mechanisms to save lives, they need look no further.

SUPPORT FOR REQUIRING ALL GUN OWNERS TO BE LICENSED AND ALL GUNS TO BE REGISTERED



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SUPPORT FOR REQUIRING ALL GUN OWNERS TO BE LICENSED AND ALL GUNS TO BE REGISTERED BY LOCATION



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Ban on assault weapons

Assault weapons were banned in the United States from 1994 to 2004, when the ban expired without being renewed. According to the *New York Times*, “In the decade after the ban, there was a 347 percent increase in fatalities in gun massacres, even as overall violent crime continued downward.”

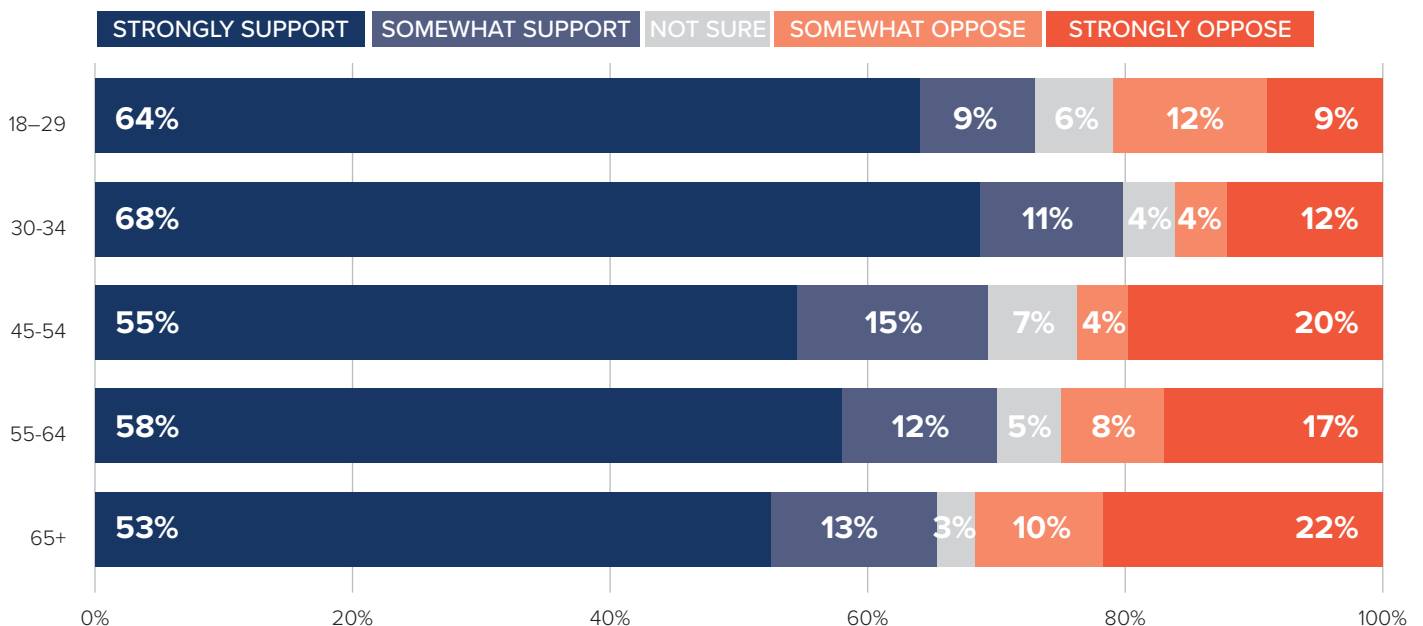
Despite this correlation, House Democrats have been hesitant to call this policy to a vote, fearing it could hurt them in rural, battleground districts.⁶ The results of our survey, however, show they have less to worry about than they may think.

Overall, 49 percent of respondents supported the ban, while 41 percent opposed it. While 43 percent of conservatives in general were “strongly opposed” (compared to the 24 percent who “strongly supported” it), we again found that opinions differed among young conservatives: 33 percent strongly supported the policy, and 24 percent strongly opposed it.

Ban on high-capacity magazines

The Las Vegas shooter fired more than 1,100 rounds⁷ in roughly ten minutes,⁸ killing fifty-eight concertgoers.⁹ As a result, “bump stocks” were rightly banned,¹⁰ though, high-capacity magazines were not. High-capacity magazines, defined in our survey as magazines holding fifteen or more rounds, are routinely¹¹ used in mass shootings, including in the recent shootings in Dayton¹² and El Paso.¹⁵ And it’s possible that reloading alone saved the lives of five children at Sandy Hook, according to the *Hartford Courant*.¹⁴ Banning high-capacity magazines found broad support across our survey respondents. Overall, 68 percent of respondents supported the policy, and 26 percent opposed it. Far from scaring off moderates, the policy enjoyed 75 percent support among them, with only 16 percent opposing. Thirty-nine percent of conservatives strongly oppose a ban on high-capacity magazines, with 26 percent strongly supporting a ban.

SUPPORT FOR A BAN ON HIGH-CAPACITY MAGAZINES
BY AGE



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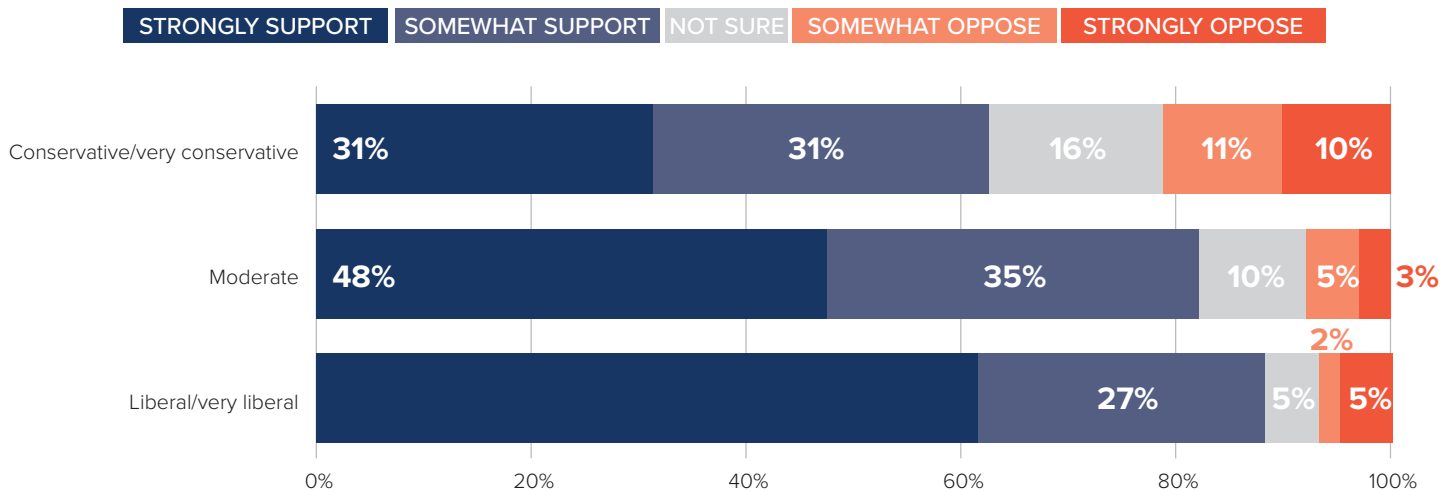
Creating community intervention programs

This policy would allocate to community-operated programs focusing on violence intervention, which would address the needs of individual communities. When it is easier to obtain a gun than it is to access empathy violence ensues. Community intervention programs are built locally to make empathy and opportunity accessible in any community. Intervention program models have centered around being hospital based, group based or “cure” based.¹⁵ These approaches are about deescalating violence and working with both victims and perpetrators to build community. These programs create jobs, decrease violence and save taxpayer dollars. Politicians and community organizers who want to curb violence by

providing job opportunities, activities, and mentorship should consider communicating the effectiveness of this policy. Even simply in monetary terms, the cost of gun violence is astronomically high,¹⁶ and messaging this policy as a cost-effective solution has worked to secure funding in numerous cities.

Our survey found that this policy enjoys majority support in every individual ideological group, with an overall support level of 77 percent and only 12 percent opposing it. Seventy-seven percent supported a policy strengthening community intervention programs that help those at risk of experiencing gun violence, with only 12 percent in opposition. Among conservatives, this policy polls at 62 percent support and 22 percent opposition.

SUPPORT FOR CREATING COMMUNITY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS
BY IDEOLOGY



DATA FOR PROGRESS

Discussing a “buyback”

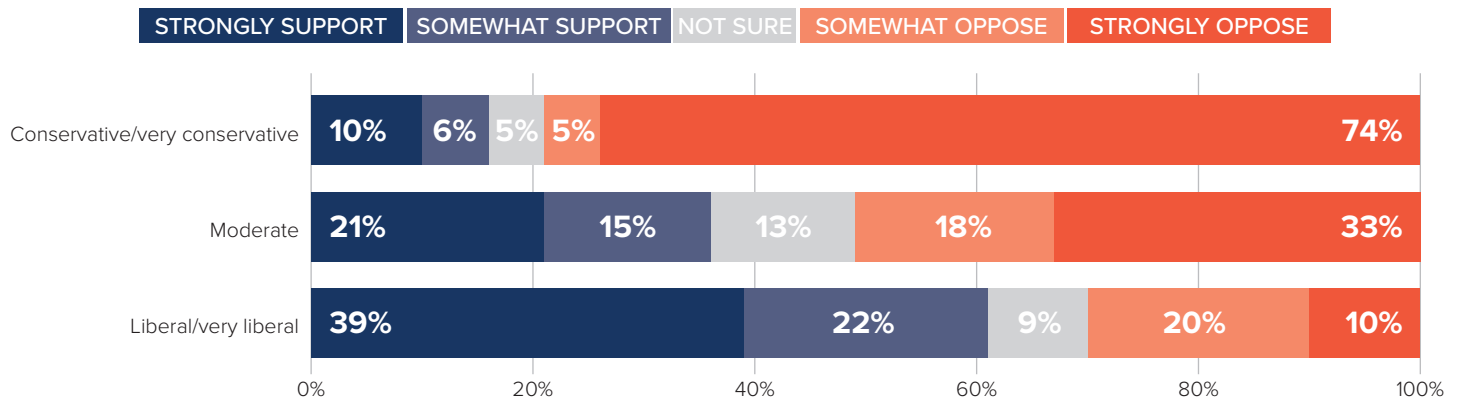
After a single gunman murdered fifty-one people in Christchurch, New Zealand,¹⁷ the country’s government launched an ambitious gun-buyback program, eventually taking over ten thousand assault weapons out of circulation.¹⁸ Estimates suggest there are around 3.75 million assault weapons in the US,¹⁹ so any kind of buyback in this country would be ambitious.

While a mandatory buyback was unpopular in our survey (37 percent support, 54 percent oppose), a voluntary buyback was well-supported among respondents (67

percent support, 26 percent oppose). Unsurprisingly, 74 percent of conservatives were strongly opposed to a mandatory buyback; however, once the policy becomes voluntary, strong opposition from conservatives drops to 38 percent, with 22 percent strongly supporting the policy. The voluntary buyback also polls with a majority support among rural (57 percent) and suburban/town (66 percent) registered voters, suggesting that hunting culture does little to curb support for the policy.

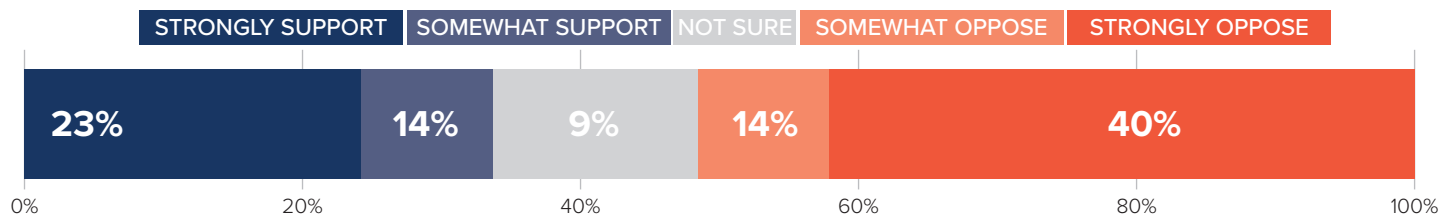
Although this might discourage Democrats from joining Beto O’Rourke’s call for a mandatory buyback,²⁰ it should also encourage candidates to champion a voluntary buyback.

SUPPORT FOR A MANDATORY GUN BUY-BACK
BY IDEOLOGY



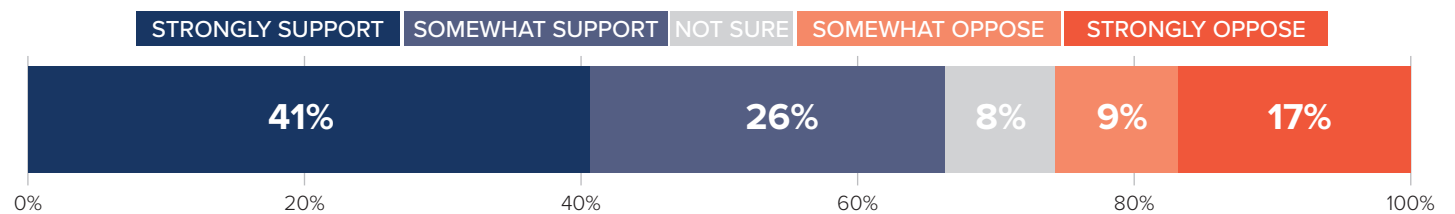
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SUPPORT FOR A MANDATORY GUN BUY-BACK



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SUPPORT FOR A VOLUNTARY GUN BUY-BACK



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Ban on 3D-printed guns

In 2018, plans for a 3D-printable firearm were posted online²¹ by a man who is now a registered sex offender prohibited from owning a gun.²² And while a federal judge barred blueprints for 3D-printable guns from being posted online, judge’s rulings can be overturned and do not hold the weight of legislation.

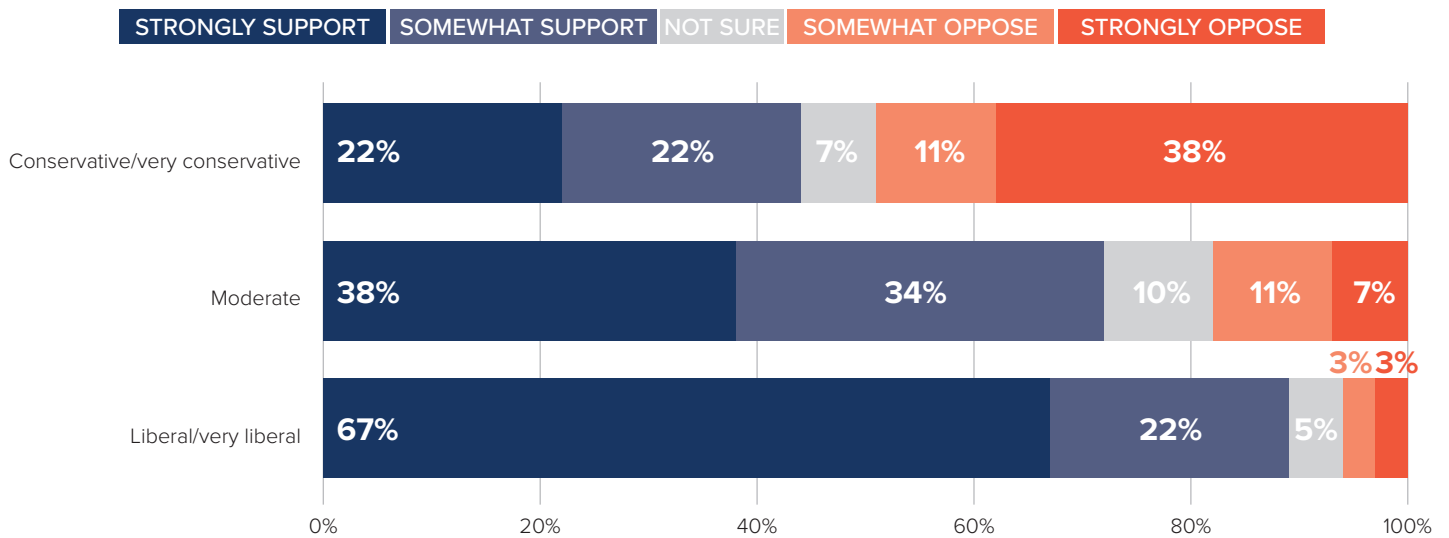
Overall, we found 73 percent support for a ban on 3D-printable guns, with only 21 percent opposing. Even 54 percent of conservatives support the ban, while 37 percent oppose it.

Legislation on smart-gun technology

The proposal for a smart gun—a gun that only its owner can fire—has existed for decades.²³ It could possibly help curb violence inflicted with stolen firearms and stop children from firing their parents’ firearms. However, these guns are unavailable in America because of the unintended consequence of a New Jersey law²⁴ and because of the NRA’s fear that smart guns could lead to making non-smart guns illegal.²⁵

Overall, we found that 62 percent of respondents supported introducing smart guns into circulation, while 26 percent opposed it.

SUPPORT FOR A VOLUNTARY GUN BUY-BACK
BY IDEOLOGY



DATA FOR PROGRESS

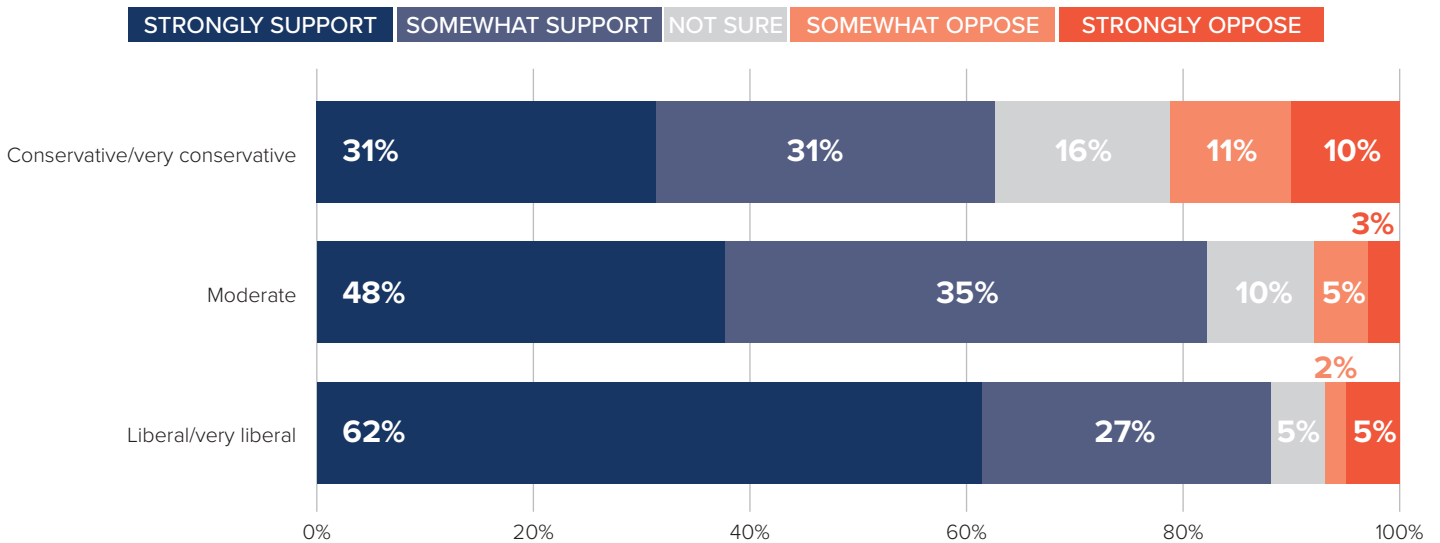
Community resources for gun safety

Another policy we polled would create community centers that adapt for what gun safety would look like in each prospective community. This garnered universal support among all groups, and 85 percent of both liberals and conservatives supported the policy. Considering that in most states there are either nonexistent standards or subpar standards for gun ownership lives could be saved by allocating resources so that people could learn proper safety tips could save lives. For example, currently, at least once a week in America, a toddler shoots someone.²⁶ Programs that provide the bare minimum of reasonable gun-safety training and advice could help reduce gun deaths.

Conclusion

Policies to curb gun violence in America have long been viewed as politically unpalatable, but new survey data shows this is not the case. Many gun policies enjoy clear bipartisan support. This data shows that almost all Republican elected officials hold views on guns that are wildly at odds with what the vast majority of voters think, including majorities of independents and Republicans.

SUPPORT FOR CREATING COMMUNITY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS
BY IDEOLOGY



DATA FOR PROGRESS

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COVER PHOTO
annie bolin/Unsplash

ENDNOTES

1. This is the most recent year for which we have complete data. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/18/us/gun-deaths.html>
2. According to the US Census, the population of Atlantic City, New Jersey was 39,558 in 2010. <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmmk>
3. <https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=666595118> and <https://www.mcall.com/news/pennsylvania/mc-nws-election-house-gun-control-20181026-story.html>
4. <https://time.com/5433987/guns-common-ground/>, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/10/05/upshot/gun-ownership-partisan-divide.html>, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/guns-divides-americans>, <https://www.economist.com/lexingtons-notebook/2013/03/29/americas-gun-divide>, and <https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/ct-met-grossman-guns-divided-america-20180605-story.html>.
5. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/10/upshot/How-to-Prevent-Gun-Deaths-The-Views-of-Experts-and-the-Public.html>
6. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/24/politics/democrats-house-assault-weapons-ban-politics/index.html>
7. <https://www.newsweek.com/las-vegas-gunman-fired-1100-bullets-during-shooting-new-forensic-report-finds-723311>
8. <https://www.businessinsider.com/timeline-shows-exactly-how-the-las-vegas-massacre-unfolded-2018-9#1013-pm-police-outside-realise-where-the-shots-are-coming-from-7>
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12. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/05/us/dayton-monday-shooter-stopped-in-seconds/index.html>
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15. <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/other-laws-policies/intervention-strategies/#cure-violence>
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18. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/12/new-zealand-gun-buyback-10000-firearms-returned-after-christchurch-attack>
19. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2012/12/assault-weapon-stats-how-many-assault-weapons-are-there-in-america.html>
20. <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/08/16/beto-orourke-buyback-gun-1466128>
21. <https://fortune.com/2018/07/31/3d-printed-gun-downloads-halted-by-u-s-district-judge/>
22. <https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2019/08/cody-wilson-pleads-guilty-to-lesser-charges-will-register-as-a-sex-offender/>
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25. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2019-04-15/the-smart-gun-doesn-t-exist-because-of-new-jersey-and-the-nra>
26. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/09/29/american-toddlers-are-still-shooting-people-on-a-weekly-basis-this-year/>