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# Pennsylvania Statewide Poll Results – Crime and Gun Violence are Growing Problems and Voters Support a Comprehensive Solution

**To:** Interested Parties

**From:** Ben Tulchin and Katie Muehlenkamp, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner

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## Introduction

According to a recent statewide poll in Pennsylvania, voters are worried about public safety and would like their elected officials to address the issue. The survey found that the public perceives that crime and gun violence are increasing problems throughout the state and voters of all parties rate it as a top concern. Voters want to implement various solutions, including more prevention programs, tougher gun safety laws, community involvement, more police on the street that are focused on high crime areas, and tougher laws on criminals who commit a crime with a gun, all of which draw bipartisan support as well as backing from voters in every region of the state. This memo discusses the poll results in more detail.

## Voters' Perceptions of Crime and Gun Violence

**Crime and gun violence are top concerns.** The poll found that both crime and gun violence are major concerns for voters throughout the state. In fact, each issue ranks as one of voters' highest priorities that they would like to see their elected officials in Harrisburg address.

- Crime as an issue ranks ahead of other problems such as taxes, gas prices, the economy, and education. Gun violence as a separate issue is on par or ranks ahead of these issues as well. (Health care ranked as the top concern as 93 percent of voters are either very or somewhat concerned about this issue and 73 percent are *very* concerned.)
- Crime and gun violence follow closely as the second and third most serious issues in the state. At the moment, nine out of 10 voters (90 percent) are concerned about crime and nearly three out of five voters (58 percent) are *very* concerned. Similar proportions of voters are worried about gun violence (86 percent concerned and 59 percent very concerned).

*Now I am going to read you a list of concerns facing Pennsylvania that you would have your elected officials address. For each one, please tell me how concerned you are about that item – very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned?*

	<b>Very Concerned</b>	<b>Somewhat Concerned</b>	<b>Total Concerned</b>	<b>Total Not Concerned</b>
The cost of health care and health insurance	73%	20%	<b>93%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Crime</b>	58%	32%	<b>90%</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Gun violence</b>	59%	27%	<b>86%</b>	<b>14%</b>
The amount we pay in taxes	59%	28%	<b>87%</b>	<b>13%</b>
The economy and a lack of good-paying jobs	48%	37%	<b>85%</b>	<b>13%</b>
The price of gas	51%	31%	<b>82%</b>	<b>18%</b>
The quality of public schools	48%	30%	<b>78%</b>	<b>20%</b>

### **Voters believe both crime and gun violence are getting worse.**

- Voters believe crime is on the rise. Nearly half of voters statewide (47 percent) perceive crime as having increased in the past year compared to only eight percent who believe crime has gone down. One out of three voters feels it has stayed about the same.
- Even more voters feel gun violence is on the rise. According to a solid majority (54 percent) of votes, gun violence in Pennsylvania has increased recently, with 38 percent reporting a significant increase. Practically no one believes gun violence has dropped (only four percent), and a third believe the level of gun violence has not changed.

### **Voters across the state believe that crime and gun violence are statewide problems and not just a “big city” issue.**

- Given the fact that most voters in the state view crime and gun violence as a major problem and is getting worse, it is not surprising that the poll found two-thirds of voters (67 percent) view gun violence as a statewide problem and only a small minority (26 percent) perceive it as a “big city” problem.

*Is gun violence primarily a problem affecting big cities, such as Philadelphia, or is it a problem that affects other parts of the state as well?*

	All Voters
Big cities primarily	26%
Other parts of state as well	67%
Both	5%
Neither	1%
Don't Know/Refused	1%

### Voters' Views on Gun Control Laws

**Support for tougher gun safety laws.** Pennsylvania voters favor stricter gun safety laws in general and specific gun safety measures. Notably, by a greater than 2-to-1 margin, Pennsylvania voters want tougher gun safety laws as two out of three voters (65 percent) favor tighter gun control measures whereas only three out of ten (30 percent) oppose such laws.

This is an issue that Pennsylvanians of all party affiliations and from every region in the state agree.

- Residents in Metro Philadelphia and the suburbs strongly support stricter gun safety laws (78 percent);
- Wilkes-Barre and Scranton voters favor tougher gun laws by a 2-to-1 margin (62 percent to 31 percent);
- Voters in the Pittsburgh media market (Allegheny County and surrounding counties) also want tougher gun laws and do so by a wide margin (59 percent to 37 percent);
- Even a majority of voters in the "T" support stricter gun safety laws (51 percent to 43 percent).

### Support for Tougher Gun Safety Laws

*Do you favor or oppose stricter gun control laws?*

	Total Support	Total Oppose
All voters	65%	30%
Philadelphia media market	78%	18%
Wilkes-Barre/Scranton media market	62%	31%
Pittsburgh media market	59%	37%
The "T"	51%	43%

While the level of support for stricter gun safety laws is impressive, support for specific proposed gun safety laws is even higher. In fact, there is overwhelming bipartisan support for many of the proposals we tested in the survey, including:

- Requiring gun owners to immediately report lost or stolen firearms to the police (96 percent support, 87 percent strongly);
- Requiring a gun safety and responsibility training class to get certified to own a gun, like we do with a driving test before getting a driver's license (90 percent, 76 percent strongly);
- Requiring gun owners to maintain guns in a secure lock box (83 percent support, 69 percent strongly);
- Making possession of a firearm without a license a felony under all circumstances (69 percent support, 50 percent strongly); and
- Limiting purchases of guns to one per month (57 percent, 42 percent strongly).

*Now I'm going to read you a list of gun safety proposals intended to reduce crime. After I read each one, I'd like you to tell me whether you support or oppose that proposal.*

	<b>Total Support</b>	<b>Strongly Support</b>
Require gun owners to immediately report lost or stolen firearms to the police	96%	87%
Require anyone who wishes to buy a gun to take a gun safety and responsibility training class in order to get certified to own a gun just like people are required to take a driving test before getting a drivers license	90%	76%
Require gun owners to maintain guns in a secure lock box	83%	69%
Make possession of a firearm without a license a felony under all circumstances	69%	50%
Limit purchases of guns to one per month and no more than 12 per year	57%	42%

## Voters Support a Wide Range of Solutions to Crime and Violence

Voters favor a comprehensive approach to reducing crime and gun violence and support a wide range of proposals to address the problem. Specifically, voters strongly support:

- expanding youth violence and violence prevention programs,
- stricter gun safety laws,
- more police on the street and focusing those police on high crime areas,
- more community involvement in preventing and fighting crime, and
- tougher punishment for criminals who use guns.

When given a list of strategies to consider individually voters expressed overwhelming support for:

**Putting more police on the streets, focusing them on high crime areas, and providing them with more resources (94 percent).** Though voters would like to see more police on the street (90 percent support, 71 percent strongly), they want them focused on high crime areas (98 percent agree, 81 percent strongly).

**The community and faith-based institutions must get involved and play a bigger role working with police (93 percent).** Voters would like to see communities get more involved in fighting and preventing crime.

- Voters want faith-based organizations and neighborhood leaders to provide opportunities for youth to come together (93 percent, 73 percent strongly).
- Most voters like the idea of setting up a phone number that residents can call to report crime rumors and tips to city officials (88 percent support, 63 percent strongly);

**Voters want more emphasis on prevention (91 percent).** Voters firmly believe that the state must focus more on violence prevention, especially youth violence prevention, in order to reduce crime and gun violence. Voters offer intense support for prevention programs and feel they are the *most effective* means to reduce crime.

- Voters want to see youth violence reduction programs expanded (93 percent support, 78 percent *strongly* support);
- Similarly, there is nearly unanimous support for more after-school programs to make sure kids are safe and supervised (92 percent support, 73 percent strongly support);
- Interestingly, of all the options we mentioned in the survey, **a plurality of voters selected prevention programs as the most effective approach to reduce crime.**

**Get tough on criminals with guns (85 percent).** To address gun violence, voters also want to target criminals who use guns. Specifically, nine out of ten voters (91 percent, 81 percent strongly) agree with imposing longer jail sentences for criminals who commit a violent crime with a gun.

**Support for tougher gun safety laws (73 percent).** Pennsylvania voters favor stricter gun safety laws in general and specific gun safety measures. Notably, by a greater than 2-to-1 margin, Pennsylvania voters want tougher gun safety laws as two out of three voters (65 percent) favor tighter gun control measures whereas only three out of ten (30 percent) oppose such laws.

## Summary

As this poll shows, Pennsylvania voters are concerned about crime and gun violence, they believe the problems are getting worse, and they want their elected officials to act in a balanced manner that encompasses legislative, policing, and preventive measures.

To solve the problem, voters want to implement various solutions, including more prevention programs, tougher gun safety laws, community involvement, more police on the street that are focused on high crime areas, and tougher laws on criminals who commit a crime with a gun, all of which draw bipartisan support as well as backing from voters in every region of the state.

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## Appendix A: Methodology

From September 13-18, 2006, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research conducted a statewide survey in Pennsylvania among a total of 1009 registered voters. The sample included:

- 604 voters statewide representative of the Pennsylvania electorate, with a corresponding margin of error of plus or minus 4.0 percent, and
- 405 interviews conducted proportionately in select legislative districts (Districts 41, 131, 161, and 169).