



Government
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Firearms Safety Public Awareness Campaign

Summary

Prepared for Public Safety

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Canada 

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This public opinion research report presents the results of an online survey conducted by EKOS Research Associates Inc. on behalf of Public Safety Canada. The research study was conducted with 2,054 Canadians in a first survey related specifically to handguns, conducted between January 14 and February 02, 2023 and 2,099 in a second survey related to firearms safety in general, conducted between March 16 and 29, 2023.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Campagne de sensibilisation du public aux enjeux de sécurité relatifs aux armes à feu.

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SUMMARY

A. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Government of Canada has introduced the most significant changes to firearms legislation in more than 40 years and is committed to delivering responsible and strong gun control to protect Canadian communities. This includes implementing a national freeze on handguns, revoking firearms licenses from those involved in acts of domestic violence or criminal harassment, and increasing criminal penalties for violations of safety regulations and applicable laws. It also includes providing more tools to combat gun trafficking and smuggling, and creating new “yellow flag” and “red flag” laws to enable courts to temporarily suspend firearms licenses due to unsafe use or require individuals to surrender their firearms to law enforcement if they are deemed a danger to themselves or others.

In 2021, Public Safety Canada launched a firearms awareness campaign, which informed Canadians that the Government of Canada is taking action to prevent gun violence by banning assault-style firearms—among other actions—and intends to implement other firearm-related legislation and regulation changes. The multi-year campaign is evidence-based and built on a variety of insights from public opinion research involving the target audience.

B. METHODOLOGY

Two separate national baseline surveys were conducted to help inform this multi-year awareness campaign:

1. A survey designed to explore awareness and attitudes about firearms safety related specifically to handguns, including views about the recently announced national freeze on handguns in Canada.
 - Included an oversample of firearm owners.
2. A survey designed to explore national levels of awareness, perceptions and understanding of new firearms regulations and tools that aim to address gun violence.
 - Included an emphasis on intimate partner violence and gender-based violence contexts.

- Included an oversample of professionals working in sectors providing services to vulnerable or marginalized populations.

The first survey, related to handgun safety and the national handgun freeze, was conducted between January 14 and February 2, 2023. The survey included 2,054 Canadians aged 18, including an oversample of 447 Canadians who own at least one firearm. The randomly recruited probability sample carries with it a margin of error of +/-2.2% (+/-4.6% among owners of firearms). The margin of error for other key segments within the sample is between +/-3% and +/-6, although 8% in Atlantic Canada. The sample source is an in-house *Probit* panel of randomly recruited Canadians. The survey instrument was delivered online as well as by telephone and available in both official languages. The average length of the survey was 14 minutes online and 19 minutes by telephone. The overall response rate for the survey was 31%.

The second survey, related to general firearm safety and the measures put in place for new firearms was conducted between March 16 and 30, 2023. The survey included a sampling of 2,099 Canadians aged 18+, including an oversample of 450 Canadians who work with vulnerable segments of the population. The randomly recruited probability sample carries with it a margin of error of +/-2.1% (+/-4.6% among those who work with vulnerable segments of the population). The margin of error for other key segments within the sample is between +/-3% and +/-8. The sample source is an in-house *Probit* panel of randomly recruited Canadians. The survey instrument was delivered online as well as by telephone and available in both official languages. The average length of the survey was 14 minutes online and 19 minutes by telephone. The overall response rate for the survey was 26%.

Appendix A presents further details on the methodology for the two surveys.

C. KEY FINDINGS

Handgun Survey

Perceived Risk in the Community

The general public are evenly split in terms of their level of concern about the threat of firearms-related violence in their own community. Just under half (48%) are not at all or not very concerned, while just over half (51%) are somewhat or very concerned. Four in ten (41%) say they hear about firearms violence in their own community sometimes or frequently, while close to six in ten (58%) say hearing about this is infrequently. In both cases, residents of smaller or rural communities are considerably less likely to say they are concerned or hear about this frequently in their community. In fact, when asked about where firearms violence is

the highest, 66% pointed to downtown/urban core areas, while 13% said this occurs in suburban areas, and only 8% think this is in small towns or other rural communities.

Perceived causes of firearms violence are most often thought to be gangs or organized crime (72%) followed by other criminal activity (42%). One in four believe a main cause is intimate partner or gender-based violence (25%) or self-harm/mental health issues (22%).

Awareness of Programs, Policies and Regulations to Address Firearms Violence

Half of Canadians (48%) feel they are either very or somewhat familiar with variety of programs, policies and regulations related to firearms safety and gun violence prevention. Firearm owners are more likely than other Canadians to say they are familiar with these (84%). Most Canadians (83%) have heard about the restrictions on the sale, purchase, and transfer of handguns. Two in three (64%) have heard about the temporary restrictions on the importation of handguns into Canada. More than half know about action against gun and gang violence (57%) and new measures and funding to tackle smuggling and trafficking of guns (55%), although very few have heard more than a little bit about it. Four in ten (39%) have heard some about expectations for those who train, compete, or coach in areas involving handguns. Firearm owners are about twice as likely to have heard about each of these measures than other Canadians, particularly the restrictions on sales and the temporary restrictions on importation of handguns.

Perceptions of Firearms-Related Measures

One in three Canadians (33%) believes that the regulations of firearms in Canada strike the right balance. Among the other two-thirds, those who feel the regulation is not strict enough (40%) outweigh those who believe it to be too strict (19%) by two to one. Close to half (46%) of firearm owners believe the regulation is too strict, which is the case among only 14% of other Canadians, who lean toward it being the right balance or not strict enough (45%).

Perceived performance of the Government of Canada when it comes to introducing measures to address gun-related violence is quite low among respondents. Two in three (69%) feel that the performance has been poor (40%) or fair (29%). Only one in four (24%) believe it to be good (20%) or excellent (4%). Firearm owners are much more likely to feel negatively (74% believe the performance has been poor). Some of the most frequently cited reasons for this include believing that it only penalizes registered gun owners (24%), and that the problem is with illegal arms (14%).

Support for measures to address firearms violence is generally high, particularly for action against gun and gang violence (94% support including 75% strong support), and new measures and funding to tackle gun smuggling and trafficking (92% including 74% strong support). Three

in five also support (75% including 41% strongly) exemptions to handgun restrictions for people who train, compete, or coach in areas involving handguns, although 15% are opposed to these exceptions. Seven in ten (71%) also support restrictions on the sale, purchase and transfer of handguns (53% strongly), although 25% are opposed to these restrictions. Results are similar for temporary restrictions of the importation of handguns into Canada (69% support with 51% showing strong support), although 23% are opposed to this. Opposition is concentrated more heavily among firearm owners, particularly on the restrictions on the sale and transfer of handguns (64%) and temporary restrictions on their importation into Canada (59%). Thinking about these latter two restrictions on handguns, 46% of firearm owners believe the measures will not be effective, while 32% think they will be somewhat effective and 17% think they will be effective. Firearm owners are much less likely than other Canadians to believe they will be effective, in fact 79% believe they will not be.

In terms of possession of several different types of handguns, the largest proportion of Canadians believe that semi-automatic handguns should not be legal (71%), although this is true of only 32% among firearm owners. Similarly, 61% believe revolvers should not be legal (25% among firearm owners). Much fewer (36%) believe that replica handguns should be illegal (13% among firearm owners).

Profile of Firearm owners

Just over one in five (22%) of the sample own firearms, who typically own between one and three firearms, most often a rifle (80% of firearm owners), or shotgun (72%), followed by a semi-automatic long gun (35%) or handgun (26%). The large majority have owned them for more than five years, and the firearms are typically used a few times a year or less. About two in three own only non-restricted firearms (60%), while 32% own both restricted and non-restricted firearms. Three in four (74%) purchased a firearm from a retailer, and nearly half (47%) inherited a firearm from a family member or friend. One in three (34%) purchased a firearm from an individual, and 24% received one as a gift. Firearms are most often used for target shooting (74%), hunting for food (48%) or hunting for sport (38%).

Firearms Safety Survey

Target Group

One in five members of the sample (21%) work with vulnerable segments of the population. The most popular areas of work are in health or medical services, and in education (26% in each sector) followed by support services (17%). A further subset of those working with vulnerable groups work with victims of gun violence and their families (36%)¹, although only 9% do so frequently and more than half do so infrequently. The main sources of firearms violence that those who support victims of gun violence see are in the areas of suicide or self-harm, gang violence or organized crime, criminal activity and intimate partner or gender-based violence.

Perceived Risk

The general public are evenly split in terms of their level of concern about the threat of firearms-related violence in their own community. Just under half (47%) are not at all or not very concerned, while just over half (47%) are somewhat or very concerned. Concern is higher outside of one's own community (73%). Four in ten (43%) say they hear about firearms violence in their own community sometimes or frequently. Residents of smaller or rural communities are considerably less likely to say they are concerned or hear about this frequently in their community. Hearing about firearms-related violence is most likely to occur through the Internet (57%), television (56%) and radio (49%), as well as social media (41%).

Perceived causes of firearms violence are most often thought to be gangs or organized crime (71%) followed by other criminal activity (45%). One in four believe a main cause is intimate partner or gender-based violence (27%) or self-harm/mental health issues (27%).

Awareness of Programs, Policies and Regulations to Address Firearms Violence

Half of Canadians (49%) feel they are either very or somewhat familiar with variety of programs, policies and regulations related to firearms safety and gun violence prevention.

Almost all Canadians (90%) have heard something about the ban on "assault style" firearms. Eight in ten (80%) have heard about the restrictions on the sale, purchase, and transfer of handguns, and nearly as many (76%) have heard of the buyback program to provide compensation for certain banned firearms. Just over half have heard about the ban on magazines capable of holding more than the legal number of bullets (58%). About half know about the requirement for business to maintain an inventory and records sales (48%) or expanding background checks to include applicants' entire history (50%). Slightly fewer have

¹ 8% of the overall sample.

heard about the requirement for sellers of a non-restricted firearms to validate the buyer's license with the government (45%) and restrictions on replica air-guns (46%). About half have heard something about the action against gun and gang violence (51%) and new measures and funding to tackle smuggling and trafficking of guns (50%), although few have heard more than a little bit about it. Fewer have heard about red and yellow flag laws (31% and 27%, respectively).

Firearm owners are about twice as likely to have heard about each of these measures than other Canadians, particularly the restrictions on sales and the temporary restrictions on importation of handguns.

Perceptions of Firearms-Related Measures

Perceived performance of the Government of Canada when it comes to introducing measures to address gun-related violence is quite low. Two in three (69%) feel that the performance has been poor (37%) or fair (32%). Only one in four (24%) believe it to be good (21%) or excellent (3%).

Support for measures to address firearms violence is generally high, particularly for new measures and funding to tackle gun smuggling and trafficking (95%) and action against gun and gang violence (94%). About eight in ten also support the eight other measures described in the survey², and 74% indicated support for a buyback program for certain banned firearms, while 63% support restrictions on the sale, purchase, and transfer of mid-velocity 'replica' air guns.

Among those who work with victims of gun violence and their families, 46% believe that red and yellow flag laws will support their work, and 29% believe these laws will be effective in protecting victims and potential victims of gun violence, although 29% also believe they will not be effective and 35% believe they will be somewhat effective.

Among the top sources for resources on providing support to victims and others are non-profit organizations (64%), workplace training (37%) and provincial government (33%), as well as through the federal government (29%) and work/professional networks (29%).

² Eight measures include banning the sale or transfer of magazines capable of holding more than the legal number of bullets; requiring businesses to maintain inventory and sales records of non-restricted firearms for trading purposes; requiring a seller of non-restricted firearms to validate a buyer's licenses with the government, "yellow flag" law allowing a Chief Firearms Officer to temporarily suspended a license; "red flag" law that enables anyone to make an application to the court to immediately remove firearms from someone's possession; expanding background checks to include a review of firearm license applicants life history; banning "assault style" firearms; and restrictions on the sale, purchase and transfer of handguns.

In terms of possession of several different types of handguns, the largest proportion of Canadians believe that semi-automatic handguns should not be legal (71%). Similarly, 60% believe revolvers should not be legal. Much fewer (36%) believe that air guns should be illegal (26% among gun owners). For rifles and shotguns with semi-automatic action, 55% of Canadians believe they should be illegal, while only 25% believe this should be the case for rifles and shotguns with manual action.

D. NOTE TO READERS

Detailed findings are presented in the sections that follow. Overall results are presented in the main portion of the narrative and are typically supported by graphic or tabular presentation of results. Bulleted text is also used to point out any statistically and substantively significant differences between sub-groups of respondents. If differences are not noted in the report, it can be assumed that they are either not statistically significant³ in their variation from the overall result, or that the difference was deemed to be substantively too small to be noteworthy. Results for the proportion of respondents in the sample who either said “don’t know” or did not provide a response may not be indicated in the graphic representation of the results in all cases, particularly where they are not sizable (e.g., 10% or less). Results may also not total to 100% due to rounding. Similarly, some totals of percentages added together for two responses may not appear correct due to rounding.

The programmed survey instruments can be found in Appendix B (Handgun Survey) and Appendix C (Firearms Safety Survey). Note that a handful of survey questions were featured in both the handgun and firearms safety surveys since each included a different sub-sample target group. It was considered important to include these five repeated measures for both gun owners and those working with vulnerable segments of society. It was also considered important to include these items in each survey so that they may be used as analytical tools to better segment other survey responses. These repeated items include: perceived level of concern for firearms violence in one’s own community; frequency of hearing about firearms violence; whether or not they were ever directly affected by firearms violence, reported familiarity with programs, policies and regulations to address firearms violence and perceived government performance in addressing firearms violence. Therefore, results are presented for these questions in each of the two different sets of detailed results chapters of the report.

³ Chi-square and standard t-tests were applied as applicable. Differences noted were significant at the 95% level.

E. CONTRACT VALUE

The contract value for the POR project is \$147,363.30 (including HST).

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To obtain more information on this study, please e-mail ps.communications-communications.sp@canada.ca

F. POLITICAL NEUTRALITY CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of EKOS Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed by:



Susan Galley (Vice President)