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## **Terrorism Worries Increase American Support to Regulate Firearms**

Concern over terrorism has further increased Americans' support for firearm regulation according to a report from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago.

"Some have speculated that the 9/11 terrorist attacks undermined support for regulating firearms, arguing that fear of terrorism increased the public desire for firearms for self-defense," said Tom W. Smith, Director of the General Social Survey (GSS) at NORC, which conducted the study and found an opposite perspective.

"When asked directly whether 'gun control laws should be stricter, making it harder for people to purchase firearms' as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, 76.5 percent backed this idea and only 16 percent endorsed less strict gun controls," said Smith. The findings are in "Public Attitudes Toward the Regulation of Firearms," a study funded by Chicago's Joyce Foundation as part of the 2006 GSS survey.

Among the other findings in the study are:

- Gun ownership in the United States has declined in the past 30 years. It has gone from a high of about 55 percent in the mid-1970s to 35 percent in the most recent GSS survey.

- People support tight regulation of firearms: 91 percent support making it illegal to use guns while under the influence of alcohol; 85 percent want the sale of 50-caliber rifles limited, and 82 percent want the sale of semi-automatic assault weapons limited.

- People also strongly support requiring a police permit before a gun could be purchased, with support around 80 percent since the early 1990s.

Like support for requiring police permits in order to purchase guns, support for regulation has remained strong or has increased in recent years, Smith said. Support for including criminal background checks for all gun sales, including those involving private sales between individuals, rose to 80 percent in 2006 from 77.5 percent in 2001. Backing for making the penalty for illegally selling guns tougher than illegal-drug sales remained steady at about 55 percent in each survey.

A 2001 GSS survey on firearm regulation showed strong support for gun-safety courses, mandatory registration of firearms, as well as for requirements that handguns be personalized (equipped with devices so non-owners cannot fire them). The survey also showed strong support for a mandatory five-day waiting period to buy a handgun. People also showed strong support for regular re-registration of handguns.

“In brief, strong majorities of the public back a wide range of measures to regulate firearms and stricter punishments for those who violate gun laws,” Smith said. “Support has been high for decades and is as high or higher today for individual restrictions than it has been in the past.”

The General Social Survey, supported by the National Science Foundation, has been conducted since 1972, and is based on face-to-face interviews of randomly selected people who represent a scientifically accurate cross section of Americans. Unlike opinion polls, which ask people about topics related to current events, the GSS captures changes in opinion about issues that remain of enduring importance in society.

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