

ILLINOIS FIREARMS STUDY FINDINGS

*Senate District 21*

***Introduction and Methodology***

This survey measures attitudes and community sentiments regarding support or opposition for changes to existing firearms laws in Illinois. The results detailed in this report are drawn from a survey of 300 registered voters in Senate District 21<sup>1</sup>. The survey questionnaire was identical to one used in a parallel survey of voters statewide. District residents were identified by matching census tract and block group numbers to listed telephone records within those geographic locations. Localities within the district were represented proportionate to their share of the population. Interviews were conducted between February 22-24, 2007.

The research was commissioned by the Legal Community Against Violence, and executed as a bipartisan collaboration of Overbrook Research (R) and Lake Research Partners (D). The sampling error of the district-level survey is +/-5.7%, at a confidence level of 95%. This means that if the survey were conducted 100 times with different samples, results would fall within approximately five and a half percentage points of those obtained here in 95 of those 100 administrations.

***Perceptions of Proposed Changes to Illinois Gun Laws***

We tested seven potential changes to current gun laws, asking voters if they strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose each. A majority strongly supports each of the proposals, with strong support exceeding 70% for three of those proposals. Seven in ten support each of those proposals at least somewhat, and opposition does not exceed 25% for any of them.

***Reporting Lost/Stolen Guns***

The most popular proposal, with 84% strongly supporting it, would require gun owners to inform law enforcement if any of their guns are lost or stolen. This proposal has near-universal appeal, but is especially popular with Democrats (91% strongly favor), Independents (97%), those with some college or an undergraduate degree (89%), and women (88%). Even the weaker groups, however, still give very strong support: men aged 40 and older (76% strongly favor), Republicans (76%), those with a high school diploma or less (69%), and those engaging in firearms

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<sup>1</sup> District 21 is mostly in DuPage, but includes portions of western Cook County. Communities partly or entirely in the district include: Elmhurst, Lombard, Glen Ellyn, Wheaton, Downers Grove, Oak Brook, Oakbrook Terrace, Villa Park, Westchester, Brookfield, Riverside, Berkeley, LaGrange Park, Glendale Heights, Broadview, Hillside, Northlake, Hinsdale, Lisle, Western Springs, and Westmont.

behavior<sup>2</sup> (67%).

### ***State Licensing***

A large majority (78%) strongly favors requiring a state license for handgun dealers. Strong support is very high across the district, but significantly stronger among women (85% strongly favor) than men (71%), with support particularly weak (though still high in absolute terms) among men under age 40 (61%). Support is also higher among Democrats and Independents (90%) than among Republicans (69%). Those with some college or an undergraduate degree are more supportive (83%) than those lacking post secondary education (61%). Even six in ten (62%) of those with firearms behavior strongly support this proposal.

### ***Safe Storage***

Another highly-rated proposal, receiving 77% strong support, would require gun owners to lock their guns if there are children under the age of 18 in the household. Again, although strong support is high across the district, it is higher among Democrats (86% strongly favor) than Republicans (71%), and stronger among those with some college education (85%) than those who did not go beyond high school (63%). Women (89%), and especially younger women (95%) are stronger supporters than men (63%) and especially younger men (51%). Even a bare majority of those engaging in firearms behavior (51%) strongly support this proposal.

### ***Expand Background Checks***

More than seven in ten (73%) strongly believe that people who buy guns from private individuals should be required to undergo a criminal background check, just like people who buy guns from stores or gun shows have to. Support is strong among all subgroups, but typical patterns again surface: Women (84% strongly favor) are more supportive than men (62%), and Democrats (81%) and Independents (90%) are more supportive than Republicans (65%) — but even half of those engaging in firearms behavior strongly favor this proposal.

### ***Fifty-Caliber Rifle Ban***

There is strong support (68%) for banning the sale and possession of powerful, military-grade fifty-caliber rifles. Again, women are much stronger supporters (78% strongly favor) than men (58%), with younger men (51%) the weakest of all. Not surprisingly, Democrats (81%) are more supportive than Republicans (59%). For the first time, strong support among those engaging in firearms behavior slips below the majority mark (to 47%). However, a majority (58%) of those engaging in

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<sup>2</sup> The survey results show that 18% of respondents own a gun, have a FOID card, have a hunting license, and/or are a member of the NRA. These respondents are referred to collectively as “engaging in firearms behavior.”

firearms behavior still support this proposal at least somewhat; 35% of such voters oppose it at least somewhat.

### ***Assault Weapons Ban***

As shown in other polling, support remains strong (67%) for a ban on the sale and possession of semi-automatic assault rifles. As this issue has been debated longer and louder than many of the other proposals, subgroup differences are somewhat more polarized than for other policies. Women (79% strongly favor), and especially those with children at home (88%) are much more supportive than men (53%), and especially younger men (43%). Strong opposition among men reaches 28%, and climbs to 35% among younger men. As usual, Democrats (81% strongly favor) and Independents (87%) are stronger supporters than Republicans (53%). Among those with firearms behavior, strong opponents (42%) outnumber strong supporters (37%), and total opposition (56%) is greater than total support (44%).

### ***One Handgun per Month***

Limiting the number of handguns an individual can purchase to one handgun per month also garners a majority (57%) strongly supporting it; fewer than one in five (18%) strongly oppose it. More than two-thirds (72%) support it at least somewhat, while one-fourth oppose it at least somewhat. Women (67% strongly favor), and especially younger women (78%) are much stronger supporters than men (50%); as usual, Democrats (68%) and Independents (72%) are stronger supporters than Republicans (51%). Total opposition reaches 33% among Republicans, which is more than twice as high as for Democrats (16%) or Independents (14%). Although a plurality of those engaging in firearms behavior (41%) strongly favors this proposal, a majority of such voters (51%) opposes it at least somewhat; 47% favor it at least somewhat.