

# OVERBROOK RESEARCH

---

## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

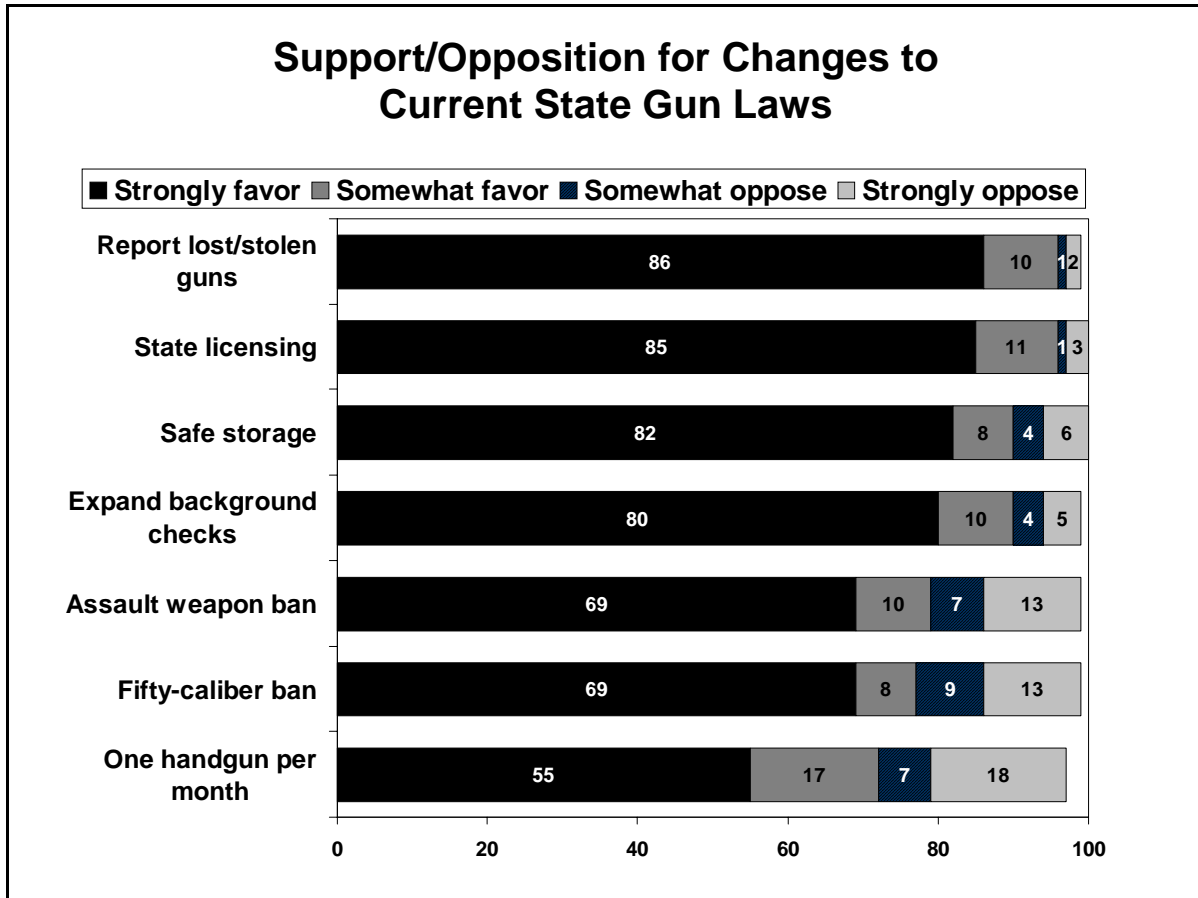
This survey measures attitudes and community sentiments concerning firearms issues in Illinois. The study specifically explores support and opposition for changes to existing laws. The statewide survey's data were obtained from 603 telephone interviews with Illinois registered voters. The telephone numbers called were provided by a computerized random number generation technique, from the telephone exchanges within the state, proportionate to each region's share of the electorate. Interviews were all conducted between February 17-20, 2007.

In addition to the statewide survey, we interviewed oversamples of 300 voters in each of four suburban Chicago state senate districts: 21, 23, 28, 43. District residents were identified by matching census tract and block group numbers to listed telephone records within those geographic locations. District interviews were conducted between February 20-25, 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 statewide survey is +/-4%, at a confidence level of 95%. This means that if the survey were conducted 100 times with different samples, results would fall within approximately four percentage points of those obtained here in 95 of those 100 administrations. The sampling error for each senate district is +/-5.7%

## PROPOSED CHANGES TO CURRENT 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 of at least 80% for four of those proposals. Two-thirds support each of those proposals at least somewhat, and opposition does not exceed 26% for any of them.



### ***Reporting Lost/Stolen Guns***

The most popular proposal, with 86% 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, garnering strong support even among men (81%), Republicans (84%), and those engaging in firearms behavior (79%). Opposition does not reach double digits even among those engaging in firearms behavior<sup>1</sup> (7%).

<sup>1</sup> The 26% of the electorate which owns a gun, has a FOID card, a hunting license, or are a member of the NRA.

## ***State Licensing***

An overwhelming majority (85%) strongly favors requiring a state license for handgun dealers. Strong support is very high across the electorate, but significantly stronger among women (88%) than men (81%), and especially younger men (72%). It is also stronger in Chicagoland (89%) than Downstate (79%) and among those engaging in firearms behavior (74%). Strong support is greater statewide and in District 23 (86%) than in District 21 (78%). There is no difference between Republicans (84%) and Democrats (86%) in strong support.

## ***Safe Storage***

Another top-tier proposal, receiving 82% 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 very high across the electorate (and reaches an astounding 98% among African Americans), there are some significant differences between subgroups. Women (91%) are more strongly supportive than men (73%), Chicago and Cook County (88%) differ from Downstate (75%), and Democrats are much more strongly supportive (89%) than Republicans (73%). Strong support is significantly higher in District 23 (84%) than District 43 (77%). Even 61% of those engaging in firearms behavior strongly support this proposal, with one-fourth opposing it.

## ***Expand Background Checks***

Eight in ten voters 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: Chicago residents (91% strongly favor) are more strongly supportive than Downstate voters (69%), women (85%) are more strongly supportive than men (74%), and Democrats (89%) are stronger supporters than Republicans (71%). Also, District 23 (82%) is more strongly supportive than District 21 (73%). Other strong supporters include those with post-graduate degrees (88%) and African Americans (94%), but even six in ten of those with firearms behavior are strongly supportive of this policy.

## ***Assault Weapons Ban***

As shown in other polling, support remains strong (69%) 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. Older women (81% strongly favor) are much more supportive than younger men (55%), those in suburban Cook (85%) are much more supportive than Downstate residents (59%), and Democrats (75%) are stronger supporters than Republicans (63%). Also, those with post graduate degrees (78%) are extremely supportive. Surprisingly, however, given the exposure

this issue has received, more people with firearms behavior strongly favor the assault weapons ban (44%) than strongly oppose it (31%).

Those in District 23 (74%) and statewide (69%) are significantly stronger supporters than District 43 residents (62%), and there is significantly more total opposition in District 43 (28%) than statewide (20%) or in the three plurality-Republican districts (20%) combined.

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

There is similarly strong support (69%) for banning the sale and possession of powerful, military-grade fifty-caliber rifles. Again, women are much stronger supporters (79%) than men (57%), Democrats (76%) are more supportive than Republicans (61%), and those in Chicago and Cook County (80%) are more supportive than voters Downstate (60%). Furthermore, post graduates (78%) give the proposal much stronger support than those lacking post-secondary education (58%). Those with firearms behavior (41%) are the only group lacking majority strong support; more than one-fourth (26%) of such voters strongly oppose the fifty-caliber rifle ban.

Although strong support or opposition does not vary across senate districts, total support is larger in District 23 (84%) than statewide (77%) or in District 43 (74%). Total opposition is higher statewide (22%) and in District 43 (24%) than in the three plurality-Republican districts (17%).

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

Limiting the number of handguns an individual can purchase to one handgun per month, garners a majority (55%) strongly supporting it; fewer than one in five (18%) strongly oppose it. Women are much more strongly supportive (63%) than men (45%), Chicagoans (66%) are much more supportive than Downstate voters (48%), and Democrats (61%) are more supportive than Republicans (48%). Furthermore, those with post-graduate degrees are very strong supporters (65%). Among those with firearms behavior, the percent strongly opposing the measure (31%) nearly equals the percent strongly supporting it (37%) – and yet, even with this group, there is a narrow majority (54%) supporting the policy at least somewhat. Only NRA members (77% oppose) and hunters (51%) have majorities opposing it. There are no differences of opinion on this policy by senate district.

### ***Issue Salience***

Four in ten say a candidate's position on these kinds of gun regulations is very important when voting; another 47% say it is somewhat important. Just over one in ten say these issues are not very important (8%) or not at all important (3%). Other groups more likely to say gun issues are very important include those aged 45 and older (46%), older women (45%), and women who have children at home (52%), Democrats (45%), those engaging in firearms behavior (51%), and especially NRA

members (65%). Voters in District 43 are more likely to say these issues are very important (43%) than are residents of District 28 (33%).

## **Conclusions**

With a total of 1,803 interviews examining seven different proposals, this is among the largest and most significant bipartisan surveys of firearms attitudes to have been publicly released. With the exception of the assault weapons ban, few of the specific policies examined here had been examined in public polling in the past. These results therefore provide unique insights into voter perceptions of firearms issues.

The proposals all test very well, with four of them garnering overwhelmingly strong support at the present time. Should Illinois legislators choose to lead in the direction of enacting these policies, they currently have the backing of the state's electorate.

Support for the policies tends to be strongest among women, African Americans, Democrats, and residents of Chicago and Cook County. Support tends to be significantly weaker among men, Republicans, Downstate residents, and those engaging in firearms behavior. Remarkably, however, even these relatively less receptive groups tend to show solid support, in absolute terms, for most of the policies (those engaging in firearms behavior being the sole exception in some cases).

Although support for the proposed policies is strong in all four senate districts, Senate District 23 is most receptive to the proposed policies. Senate District 43 is the least receptive. Interestingly, although District 43 is plurality Democrat, it has the highest rate of FOID card issuance and gun ownership; 35% of District 43 residents engage in firearms behavior, which is considerably higher than elsewhere.

The reported salience of these proposals for voting is quite high, but—not surprisingly—is especially so for NRA members and others engaging in firearms behavior. While support for the proposed policies might be very high with the electorate as a whole, this salience differential means the political fight for enactment of them is far from a foregone conclusion.