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For Most U.S. Gun Owners, Protection Is the Main Reason They Own a Gun

Nearly half of U.S. adults who do not currently own a gun say they could see themselves owning one in the future

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How we did this

Pew Research Center conducted this study to better understand Americans' views of gun ownership. For this analysis, we surveyed 5,115 adults from June 5-11, 2023. Everyone who took part in this survey is a member of the Center's American Trends Panel (ATP), an online survey panel that is recruited through national, random sampling of residential addresses. This way nearly all U.S. adults have a chance of selection. The survey is weighted to be representative of the U.S. adult population by gender, race, ethnicity, partisan affiliation, education and other categories. [Read more about the ATP's methodology.](#)

Here are the [questions used for the report](#) and its [methodology](#).

For Most U.S. Gun Owners, Protection Is the Main Reason They Own a Gun

Nearly half of U.S. adults who do not currently own a gun say they could see themselves owning one in the future

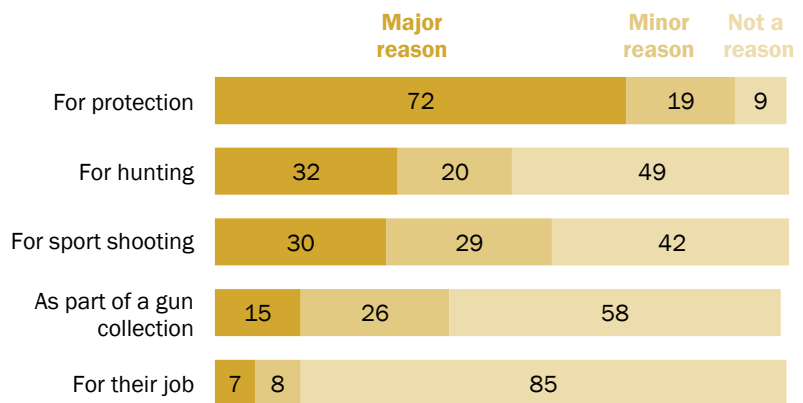
Gun owners in the United States continue to cite protection far more than other factors, including hunting and sport shooting, as a major reason they own a gun.

And while a sizable majority of gun owners (71%) say they *enjoy* having a gun, an even larger share (81%) say they *feel safer* owning a gun.

A Pew Research Center survey, conducted June 5-11 among 5,115 members of the Center's nationally representative American Trends Panel, finds:

Nearly three-quarters of U.S. gun owners cite protection as a major reason they own a gun

% of gun owners saying each is a ___ why they own a gun



Note: No answer responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.

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72% of U.S. gun owners say protection is a major reason they own a gun. That far surpasses the shares of gun owners who cite other reasons.

This view has changed only modestly since the Center's major survey of [attitudes toward gun ownership and gun policies](#) in 2017. At that time, 67% of gun owners cited protection as a major reason they owned a firearm.

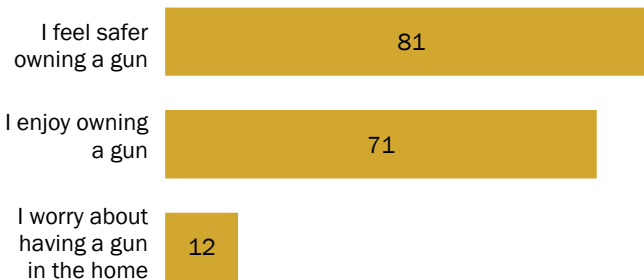
The demographics of gun ownership have changed little in recent years. Gun ownership is far more common among residents of rural areas (47%) than among people living in suburbs (30%) or urban areas (20%). Republicans and Republican-leaning independents (45%) are far more likely than Democrats and Democratic leaners (20%) to report owning a gun.

Few gun owners worry about having a gun in their home. Just 12% of gun owners say they worry about having guns in their home; 88% say they do not.

Sizable majorities say owning a gun makes them feel safer and gives them a feeling of enjoyment.

Most gun owners say they feel safer owning a gun

% of gun owners who say ___ describes how they feel



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.

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How non-gun owners feel about possibly owning a gun. About half of Americans who don't own a gun say they could never see themselves owning one (52%) while nearly as many could imagine themselves as gun owners in the future (47%). These views are little changed from 2017.

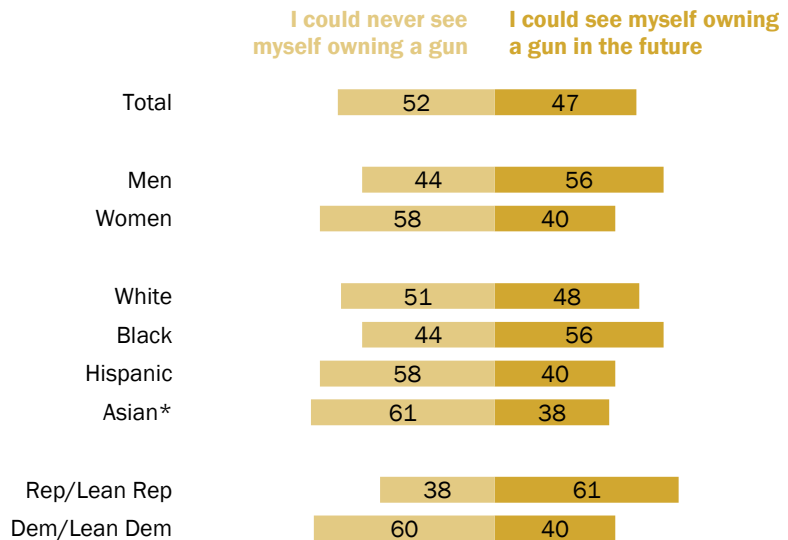
Men who do not own a gun are far more likely than women non-owners to say they could see themselves owning a gun in the future (56% vs. 40%).

While a larger share of Republicans than Democrats say they own a gun, Republican non-owners also are more likely than Democratic non-owners to say they would consider owning a gun in the future (61% vs. 40%).

A narrow majority of Black non-owners (56%) say they could see themselves owning a gun in the future, compared with smaller shares of White (48%), Hispanic (40%) and Asian non-owners (38%).

Non-gun owners are divided on whether they could see themselves owning a gun in the future

% of non-gun owners who say ...



* Estimates for Asian adults are representative of English speakers only.

Notes: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. No answer responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.

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Americans' views on whether it is too easy to legally obtain a gun

A majority of Americans (61%) say it is too easy to legally obtain a gun in this country, while 30% say the ease of legally obtaining a gun is about right; 9% say it is too hard.

[A Center report released in June](#) found that 58% say gun laws should be stricter than they are today; 26% think they are about right, while 15% favor less strict gun laws.

There are demographic and partisan differences in opinions about whether it is too easy to legally obtain a gun:

Community type

Majorities of U.S. adults living in urban (72%) and suburban (63%) communities say it is too easy to legally obtain a gun.

Opinion among rural residents is more divided: 47% say it is too easy, 41% say it is about right and 11% say it is too hard.

Gun owners and non-owners

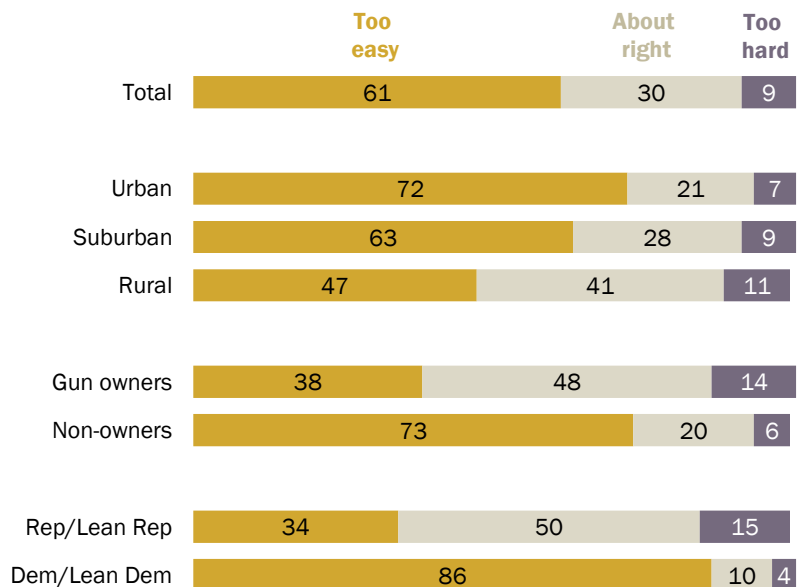
Non-owners are nearly twice as likely as gun owners to say it is too easy to legally obtain a gun (73% vs. 38%).

Republicans and Democrats

The partisan divide in opinions about the ease of legally obtaining guns in the U.S. is wider than the difference in views between gun owners and non-owners. An overwhelming share of Democrats (86%) say it is too easy to obtain a gun legally. About a third of Republicans (34%) say the same.

About 6 in 10 Americans say it is too easy to legally obtain a gun in this country

% who say it is ___ to legally obtain a gun in this country



Note: No answer responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.

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Gun ownership in the United States

The shares of adults who say they personally own a gun – or that someone else in their household owns a gun – has changed little in recent years. Roughly a third (32%) say they own a gun; another 10% say that while they do not personally own a gun, someone else in their household does.

Gender and race

Four-in-ten men say they own a gun, compared with a quarter of women.

And White adults are far more likely than Black, Hispanic or Asian adults to say they personally own a gun.

Community type

Reported gun ownership is much higher among adults living in rural areas (47%) than suburban (30%) or urban residents (20%).

Republicans and Democrats

Republicans, particularly conservative Republicans, are far more likely than Democrats to say they own a gun.

About half of conservative Republicans (51%) say they own a gun. That compares with 38% of moderate and liberal Republicans, 24% of conservative and moderate Democrats, and 16% of liberal Democrats.

Nearly a third of U.S. adults say they personally own a gun

% who say they ...

	Personally own a gun	Don't own a gun but someone else in their household does	NET Gun in household
All adults	32	10	42
Men	40	5	45
Women	25	15	40
White	38	11	49
Black	24	10	34
Hispanic	20	8	28
Asian*	10	8	18
Ages 18-29	21	12	33
30-49	33	10	42
50-64	37	9	46
65+	35	11	46
Postgrad	23	10	33
College grad	30	10	40
Some college	36	11	47
HS or less	33	10	43
Urban	20	7	28
Suburban	30	11	41
Rural	47	11	59
Rep/Lean Rep	45	10	55
Conserv	51	8	59
Mod/Lib	38	13	51
Dem/Lean Dem	20	10	31
Cons/Mod	24	10	34
Liberal	16	11	27

* Estimates for Asian adults are representative of English speakers only.

Note: White, Black and Asian adults include only those who report being one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanic adults are of any race.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.

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Feelings about gun ownership

Gun owners express overwhelmingly positive sentiments about owning a gun, with sizable majorities saying it makes them feel safer and that they enjoy having a gun.

However, people who do not own guns but live in households in which there is a gun present are far less likely to voice positive sentiments.

While 81% of gun owners say owning a gun makes them feel safer, a smaller majority of non-owners in gun households (57%) say the same about the presence of a gun in the home.

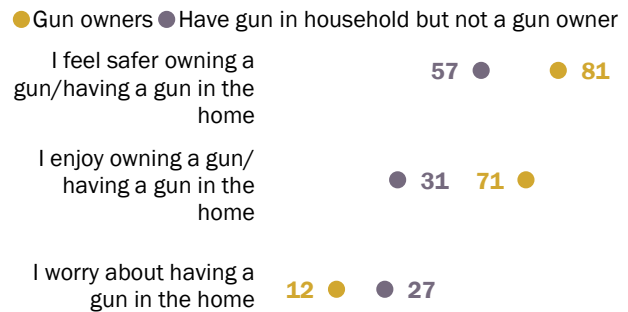
About three-in-ten non-owners in gun households (31%) enjoy having a gun in the house; that compares with 71% of gun owners who say they enjoy owning a gun.

And a larger share of non-owners (27%) than owners (12%) worry about having a gun in the home.

There also are partisan differences among gun owners in their opinions about owning a gun. Republican gun owners are more likely than Democratic gun owners to say owning a gun gives them feelings of safety and enjoyment, while Democratic gun owners are more likely to say they worry about having a gun in the home.

Differences in feelings about guns between gun owners and non-owners in gun households

% who say ...

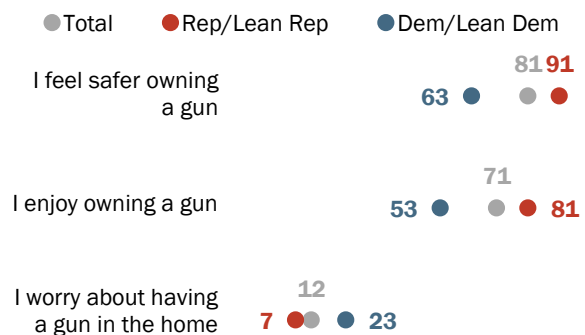


Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.

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Democratic gun owners less likely than Republican owners to say guns make them feel safer, give them enjoyment

% of gun owners who say ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 5-11, 2023.

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Measuring gun ownership

Measuring gun ownership in the United States comes with a unique set of challenges. Unlike many demographic measures, there is not a definitive data source from the government or elsewhere on how many American adults own guns.

This survey, conducted June 5-11, 2023 on Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel, asks about gun ownership using two separate questions to measure personal and household ownership. About a third of adults (32%) say they own a gun, while another 10% say they do not personally own a gun but someone else in their household does. These shares are little changed from surveys conducted in [2021](#) and [2017](#). In each of those surveys, 30% reported they owned a gun.

These numbers are largely consistent with rates of gun ownership reported by [Gallup](#), but somewhat higher than those reported by the [General Social Survey](#). Those surveys also find only modest changes in recent years.

The FBI maintains data on background checks on individuals attempting to purchase firearms in the United States. The FBI reported a [surge in background checks](#) in 2020 and 2021, during the coronavirus pandemic. The number of federal background checks declined in 2022 and through the first half of this year, [according to FBI statistics](#).

Acknowledgments

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Methodology

The American Trends Panel survey methodology

Overview

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults. Panelists participate via self-administered web surveys. Panelists who do not have internet access at home are provided with a tablet and wireless internet connection. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish. The panel is being managed by Ipsos.

Data in this report is drawn from ATP Wave 129, conducted from June 5 to June 11, 2023, and includes an [oversample](#) of Hispanic men, non-Hispanic Black men, and non-Hispanic Asian adults in order to provide more precise estimates of the opinions and experiences of these smaller demographic subgroups. These oversampled groups are weighted back to reflect their correct proportions in the population. A total of 5,115 panelists responded out of 5,865 who were sampled, for a response rate of 87%. The cumulative response rate accounting for nonresponse to the recruitment surveys and attrition is 3%. The break-off rate among panelists who logged on to the survey and completed at least one item is 1%. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 5,115 respondents is plus or minus 1.7 percentage points.

Panel recruitment

The ATP was created in 2014, with the first cohort of panelists invited to join the panel at the end of a large, national, landline and cellphone random-digit-dial survey that was conducted in both English and Spanish. Two additional recruitments were conducted using the same method in 2015 and 2017, respectively. Across these three surveys, a total of 19,718 adults were invited to

American Trends Panel recruitment surveys

Recruitment dates	Mode	Invited	Joined	Active panelists remaining
Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014	Landline/ cell RDD	9,809	5,338	1,498
Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015	Landline/ cell RDD	6,004	2,976	879
April 25 to June 4, 2017	Landline/ cell RDD	3,905	1,628	431
Aug. 8 to Oct. 31, 2018	ABS	9,396	8,778	4,113
Aug. 19 to Nov. 30, 2019	ABS	5,900	4,720	1,465
June 1 to July 19, 2020; Feb. 10 to March 31, 2021	ABS	3,197	2,812	1,541
May 29 to July 7, 2021; Sept. 16 to Nov. 1, 2021	ABS	1,329	1,162	785
May 24 to Sept. 29, 2022	ABS	3,354	2,869	1,690
	Total	42,894	30,283	12,402

Note: RDD is random-digit dial; ABS is address-based sampling. Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves or who did not complete an annual profiling survey are removed from the panel. Panelists also become inactive if they ask to be removed from the panel.

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join the ATP, of whom 9,942 (50%) agreed to participate.

In August 2018, the ATP switched from telephone to address-based recruitment. Invitations were sent to a stratified, random sample of households selected from the U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File. Sampled households receive mailings asking a randomly selected adult to complete a survey online. A question at the end of the survey asks if the respondent is willing to join the ATP. In 2020 and 2021 another stage was added to the recruitment. Households that did not respond to the online survey were sent a paper version of the questionnaire, \$5 and a postage-paid return envelope. A subset of the adults who returned the paper version of the survey were invited to join the ATP. This subset of adults received a follow-up mailing with a \$10 pre-incentive and invitation to join the ATP.

Across the five address-based recruitments, a total of 23,176 adults were invited to join the ATP, of whom 20,341 agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. In each household, one adult was selected and asked to go online to complete a survey, at the end of which they were invited to join the panel. Of the 30,283 individuals who have ever joined the ATP, 12,402 remained active panelists and continued to receive survey invitations at the time this survey was conducted.

The U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File has been estimated to cover as much as 98% of the population, although some studies suggest that the coverage could be in the low 90% range.¹ The American Trends Panel never uses breakout routers or chains that direct respondents to additional surveys.

Sample design

The overall target population for this survey was non-institutionalized persons ages 18 and older living in the U.S., including Alaska and Hawaii. It featured a stratified random sample from the ATP in which Hispanic men, non-Hispanic Black men, and non-Hispanic Asian adults were selected with certainty. The remaining panelists were sampled at rates designed to ensure that the share of respondents in each stratum is proportional to its share of the U.S. adult population to the greatest extent possible. Respondent weights are adjusted to account for differential probabilities of selection as described in the Weighting section below.

Questionnaire development and testing

The questionnaire was developed by Pew Research Center in consultation with Ipsos. The web program was rigorously tested on both PC and mobile devices by the Ipsos project management

¹ AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. "[AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling.](#)"

team and Pew Research Center researchers. The Ipsos project management team also populated test data that was analyzed in SPSS to ensure the logic and randomizations were working as intended before launching the survey.

Incentives

All respondents were offered a post-paid incentive for their participation. Respondents could choose to receive the post-paid incentive in the form of a check or a gift code to Amazon.com or could choose to decline the incentive. Incentive amounts ranged from \$5 to \$20 depending on whether the respondent belongs to a part of the population that is harder or easier to reach. Differential incentive amounts were designed to increase panel survey participation among groups that traditionally have low survey response propensities.

Data collection protocol

The data collection field period for this survey was June 5 to June 11, 2023. Postcard notifications were mailed to all ATP panelists with a known residential address on June 5.

Invitations were sent out in two separate launches: soft launch and full launch. Sixty panelists were included in the soft launch, which began with an initial invitation sent on June 5. The ATP panelists chosen for the initial soft launch were known responders who had completed previous ATP surveys within one day of receiving their invitation. All remaining English- and Spanish-speaking sampled panelists were included in the full launch and were sent an invitation on June 6.

All panelists with an email address received an email invitation and up to two email reminders if they did not respond to the survey. All ATP panelists who consented to SMS messages received an SMS invitation and up to two SMS reminders.

Invitation and reminder dates, ATP Wave 125

	Soft launch	Full launch
Initial invitation	June 5, 2023	June 6, 2023
First reminder	June 8, 2023	June 8, 2023
Final reminder	June 10, 2023	June 10, 2023

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Data quality checks

To ensure high-quality data, the Center’s researchers performed data quality checks to identify any respondents showing clear patterns of satisficing. This includes checking for very high rates of leaving questions blank, as well as always selecting the first or last answer presented. As a result of this checking, six ATP respondents were removed from the survey dataset prior to weighting and analysis.

Weighting

The ATP data is weighted in a multistep process that accounts for multiple stages of sampling and nonresponse that occur at different points in the survey process. First, each panelist begins with a base weight that reflects their probability of selection for their initial recruitment survey. These weights are then rescaled and adjusted to account for changes in the design of ATP recruitment surveys from year to year. Finally, the weights are calibrated to align with the population benchmarks in the accompanying table to correct for nonresponse to recruitment surveys and panel attrition. If only a subsample of panelists was invited to participate in the wave, this weight is adjusted to account for any differential probabilities of selection.

American Trends Panel weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Age (detailed)	2021 American Community Survey (ACS)
Age x Gender	
Education x Gender	
Education x Age	
Race/Ethnicity x Education	
Born inside vs. outside the U.S. among Hispanics and Asian Americans	
Years lived in the U.S.	
Census region x Metro/Non-metro	2021 CPS March Supplement
Volunteerism	2021 CPS Volunteering & Civic Life Supplement
Voter registration	2018 CPS Voting and Registration Supplement
Party affiliation	2022 National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS)
Frequency of internet use	
Religious affiliation	
<i>Additional weighting dimensions applied within Black adults</i>	
Age	2021 American Community Survey (ACS)
Gender	
Education	
Hispanic ethnicity	
Voter registration	2018 CPS Voting and Registration Supplement
Party affiliation	2022 National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS)
Religious affiliation	

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on non-institutionalized adults. Voter registration is calculated using procedures from Hur, Achen (2013) and rescaled to include the total U.S. adult population.

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Among the panelists who completed the survey, this weight is then calibrated again to align with the population benchmarks identified in the accompanying table and trimmed at the 1st and 99th

percentiles to reduce the loss in precision stemming from variance in the weights. Sampling errors and tests of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey.

Sample sizes and margins of error, ATP Wave 129

Group	Unweighted sample size	Weighted %	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	5,115		1.7 percentage points
Rep/Lean Rep	2,279	46	2.5 percentage points
Dem/Lean Dem	2,644	47	2.4 percentage points
Gun owners	1,652		2.9 percentage points
Non-owners	3,342		2.2 percentage points
Have a gun in household, but are not a gun owner	457		5.6 percentage points

Note: This survey includes oversamples of Hispanic men, non-Hispanic Black men, and non-Hispanic Asian adults. Unweighted sample sizes do not account for the sample design or weighting and do not describe a group's contribution to weighted estimates. See the Sample design and Weighting sections above for details.

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Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Dispositions and response rates

Final dispositions, ATP Wave 129

	AAPOR code	Total
Completed interview	1.1	5,115
Logged on to survey; broke off	2.12	59
Logged on to survey; did not complete any items	2.1121	31
Never logged on (implicit refusal)	2.11	653
Survey completed after close of the field period	2.27	1
Completed interview but was removed for data quality		6
Screened out		0
Total panelists sampled for the survey		5,865
Completed interviews	I	5,115
Partial interviews	P	0
Refusals	R	743
Non-contact	NC	1
Other	O	6
Unknown household	UH	0
Unknown other	UO	0
Not eligible	NE	0
Total		5,865
AAPOR RR1 = I / (I+P+R+NC+O+UH+UO)		87%

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Cumulative response rate as of ATP Wave 129

	Total
Weighted response rate to recruitment surveys	12%
% of recruitment survey respondents who agreed to join the panel, among those invited	71%
% of those agreeing to join who were active panelists at start of Wave 129	48%
Response rate to Wave 129 survey	87%
Cumulative response rate	3%

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**2023 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL
WAVE 129 JUNE 2023
FINAL TOPLINE
JUNE 5-11, 2023
N=5,115**

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE****ASK ALL:**

GUNEASY_L In this country, do you think it is ... **[RANDOMIZE OPTIONS 1 AND 2 WITH OPTION 3 ALWAYS LAST]**

Jun 5-11,
2023

61	Too easy to legally obtain a gun
9	Too hard to legally obtain a gun
30	About right
1	No answer

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE****ASK GUN OWNERS (GUN=1) [N=1,652]:**

REASONGUN Below are some of the reasons that some people say they own guns. For each, please indicate whether it is a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason why you own a gun.
[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]

		<u>Major reason</u>	<u>Minor reason</u>	<u>Not a reason</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a.	For protection				
	Jun 5-11, 2023	72	19	9	*
	Apr 4-18, 2017	67	24	8	*
b.	For hunting				
	Jun 5-11, 2023	32	20	49	*
	Apr 4- 18, 2017	38	23	39	*
c.	For sport shooting, including target shooting and trap and skeet				
	Jun 5-11, 2023	30	29	42	*
	Apr 4-18, 2017	30	38	32	*
d.	As part of a gun collection				
	Jun 5-11, 2023	15	26	58	*
	Apr 4-18, 2017	13	28	59	*
e.	For my job				
	Jun 5-11, 2023	7	8	85	*
	Apr 4-18, 2017	8	10	82	1

ASK IF GUNOWNER (GUN=1) [N=1,652]:

GUNFEEL_OWN Do each of the following describe how you feel about owning a gun? **[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

		Yes, describes <u>how I feel</u>	No, does not describe <u>how I feel</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a.	I enjoy owning a gun Jun 5-11, 2023	71	28	*
b.	I worry about having a gun in the home Jun 5-11, 2023	12	88	*
c.	I feel safer owning a gun Jun 5-11, 2023	81	19	*

ASK IF GUN IN HOUSEHOLD BUT NOT A GUN OWNER (GUN1=1 AND GUN=2,99) [N=457]:

GUNFEEL_HOUSE Do each of the following describe how you feel about having a gun in your home? **[RANDOMIZE ITEMS]**

		Yes, describes <u>how I feel</u>	No, does not describe <u>how I feel</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a.	I enjoy having a gun in the home Jun 5-11, 2023	31	67	2
b.	I worry about having a gun in the home Jun 5-11, 2023	27	73	*
c.	I feel safer having a gun in the home Jun 5-11, 2023	57	43	*

ASK NON-GUN OWNERS (GUN=2) [N=3,342]:

COULDDOWN Which best describes you? **[RANDOMIZE OPTIONS]**

		TREND FOR COMPARISON
Jun 5-11, <u>2023</u>		Apr 4-18, <u>2017</u> ²
47	I could see myself owning a gun in the future	52
52	I could never see myself owning a gun	47
1	No answer	1

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

² In 2017, the question was asked of people who said they owned a gun previously.

ASK ALL:

PARTY In politics today, do you consider yourself a:

ASK IF INDEP/SOMETHING ELSE (PARTY=3 or 4) OR MISSING:PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to...³

<u>Republican</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Independent</u>	<u>Something else</u>	<u>No answer</u>	<i>Lean Rep</i>	<i>Lean Dem</i>
28	28	28	15	2	18	19

³ PARTY and PARTYLN asked in a prior survey.