



DEMOCRACY REMIXED: BLACK YOUTH AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN POLITICS

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Gun Violence and Public Opinion on Gun Control among America's Young People

In the wake of the Newtown, Connecticut massacre and surges of shootings in cities like Chicago, Congress and state legislatures have considered a variety of measures to reduce gun violence. Because young people have been the victims of these tragedies with increasing frequency, we examined public opinion on gun control among youth between the ages of 18 and 29. Our data reveal the following:

- In general, clear majorities of young people support a variety of proposals designed to reduce gun violence, though Black and Latino youth are more supportive than white youth of increased restrictions on gun ownership;
- White youth are more likely to prioritize protecting the rights of gun owners (57.2 percent) over controlling access to weapons (42.8 percent). Black (76.2 percent) and Latino (69.6 percent) youth, however, believe it is more important to limit gun access than it is to protect rights of gun owners.
- White youth reported carrying guns at considerably higher rates than either Black or Latino youth. However, nearly a quarter (22.5 percent) of Black youth reported that either they or someone they know experienced gun violence in the last year, compared with 14.5 percent of Latino youth and 8.3 percent of white youth. More than 30 percent of Black youth (30.5 percent) reported that gun violence is a “big problem” or “somewhat of a problem” in their neighborhoods, compared with 23.9 percent of Latino youth and 7.4 percent of white youth.
- Overall, young people generally attribute high levels of urban gun violence to gang activity (61.6 percent) and illegal drugs (34.0 percent). Relatively

few youth attribute high levels of urban violence to ineffective policing (5.3 percent), overly restrictive laws on gun ownership (6.0 percent), or violence in television, movies, and video games (11.6 percent). Youth of color are more likely than white youth to believe that urban gun violence is caused by too many guns in circulation at much higher rates than white youth, while Black youth believe that unemployment and lack of jobs is to blame for high levels of urban gun violence at much higher rates (15.9 percent) than either Latino (8.2 percent) or white (9.6 percent) youth.

Black and Latino Youth Express Greater Support for Increased Restrictions on Gun Ownership

Over the last several months, policymakers have discussed a variety of proposals aimed at reducing gun violence. In general, we find broad support for these measures among young people. As Table 1 shows, clear majorities of youth support nationwide bans on semi-automatic weapons (56.4 percent) and high-capacity magazines (59.4 percent), increasing the number of police and armed guards in places like schools and malls (68.7 percent), implementing criminal background checks for all gun sales (89.0 percent), improving mental health screening and treatment (90.1 percent), and stiffening penalties for people convicted of gun law violations (88.4 percent). For the most part, these data are broadly consistent with levels of support among the general public for these proposals.

However, in examining the views of young people toward gun control, we find several important differences across racial groups. First, we note that there are virtually *no* racial differences in levels of support for criminal background checks, improved mental health screening and treatment, and increased penalties for gun violations. However, white youth are considerably less supportive of increasing the number of police and armed guards in public places (64.7 percent) than either Black (76.3 percent) or Latino (75.0 percent). More strikingly, youth of color are substantially more supportive of additional restrictions on gun ownership than white youth. About two-thirds of Black (67.6 percent) and Latino (65.2 percent) youth support a ban on semi-automatic weapons, compared with a bare majority (50.8 percent) of white youth. Furthermore, while more than seventy percent of

both Black (74.4 percent) and Latino (70.0) youth support a ban on high-capacity magazines, only 52.2 percent of white youth agree.

Table 1: Support for Gun Control Measures among Youth (Ages 18-29)

Proposal	Blacks (%)	Whites (%)	Latinos (%)	All (%)
Nationwide ban on semi-automatic weapons	67.6	50.8	65.2	56.4
More police/armed guards in public places like schools and malls	76.3	64.7	75.0	68.7
Criminal background checks for all gun sales	89.6	89.0	88.8	89.0
Better mental health screening and treatment	88.7	91.1	92.8	90.1
Nationwide ban on high-capacity magazines	74.4	52.2	70.0	59.4
Stiffer penalties for gun law convictions	86.1	89.4	86.8	88.4

Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, April/May 2013.

These differences are further observed when asking young people to indicate which principle is more important when it comes to gun policy—whether it is more important to protect the rights of gun owners, or more important to control access to gun ownership. As Table 2 below shows, large majorities of young Blacks (76.2 percent) and Latinos (69.6 percent) report that it is more important to control gun ownership. In contrast, nearly sixty percent (57.2 percent) of white youth report that it is more important to protect the rights of gun owners. Overall, these figures compare favorably with those reported by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press when the same question is asked of the general public.¹ However, the differences across racial groups among young people raise further questions about the source of these divergent opinions.

¹ See, e.g., <http://www.people-press.org/2013/05/23/gun-rights-vs-gun-control/#total>.

Table 2: Opinion on Gun Rights vs. Gun Control among Youth

Priority	Blacks (%)	Whites (%)	Latinos (%)	All (%)
More important to protect rights of gun owners	23.8	57.2	30.4	46.3
More important to control gun ownership	76.2	42.8	69.6	53.7

Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, April/May 2013.

Personal Experiences with Guns and Gun Violence

In many ways, the racial differences shown in the tables above reflect differences in young people’s lived experiences. Not all young people are exposed to guns and gun violence at the same level, and these differences in experiences may contribute to different opinions regarding how best to address contemporary issues of gun violence.

As Table 3 shows, more than a third (37.7 percent) of young people report that either they or someone they know carried a gun sometime in the last month. Contrary to popular perceptions, and perhaps as a consequence of geographic segregation between urban and rural areas, young whites reported carrying a gun at substantially higher rates (46.2 percent) than either young Blacks (24.4 percent) or young Latinos (22.2 percent). Thus, restrictions on gun ownership are likely to have the greatest impact on the ability of young whites to carry and use guns, which may help to explain why white youth expressed the lowest level of support for new bans on weapons and ammunition.

However, Black youth were considerably more likely to report having experienced gun *violence*, as the bottom row of Table 3 shows. Nearly a quarter (22.5 percent) of Black youth report that either they or someone they know experienced gun violence (for instance, being threatened with a gun or being the victim of a shooting) in the last year, compared with 14.5 percent of Latino youth and 8.3 percent of white youth. The higher levels of personal experience with gun violence, then, may help explain why young people of color are much more

supportive than white youth of implementing more restrictive measures on gun ownership.

Table 3: Personal Experiences with Guns among Youth

Experience	Blacks (%)	Whites (%)	Latinos (%)	All (%)
You or someone you know carried a gun in the last month	24.4	46.2	22.2	37.7
You or someone you know experienced gun violence in the last year	22.5	8.3	14.5	11.8

Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, April/May 2013.

These differences are further magnified when asking young people about their level of concern about being a victim of gun violence. We asked respondents to indicate how afraid they are that either they, a member of their family, or a close friend might be the victim of gun violence in the coming year. Table 4A below displays the results. Though nearly nine percent (8.7 percent) of youth reported being “very afraid”, these figures were considerably higher among Black (17.4 percent) and Latino (21.6 percent) youth. Only 2.1 percent of white youth reported being “very afraid.” Moreover, only 28.7 percent each of Black and Latino youth said that they were “not afraid”, compared with more than half (52.8 percent) of white youth.

Furthermore, as Table 4B shows, youth of color were much more likely than white youth to report that gun violence is a problem in the neighborhood where they live. More than thirty percent (30.5 percent) of Black youth said that gun violence is either a “big problem” or “somewhat of a problem”, and nearly a quarter (23.9 percent) of Latino youth reported the same. In contrast, considerably fewer (7.4 percent) white youth indicated that gun violence is a “big problem” or “somewhat of a problem” in their neighborhood. These data indicate quite strikingly that youth of color have very different experiences with guns and gun violence compared with white youth. These differences, then, may help to explain racial differences in support for gun control measures.

Table 4A: Fear of Victimization from Gun Violence among Youth

How afraid are you that a member of your family, or a close friend, or you yourself might be the victim of gun violence during the coming year?	Blacks (%)	Whites (%)	Latinos (%)	All (%)
Very afraid	17.4	2.1	21.6	8.7
Somewhat afraid	24.7	13.5	21.2	16.9
A little afraid	29.2	31.6	28.6	30.6
Not afraid	28.7	52.8	28.7	43.8

Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, April/May 2013.

Table 4B: Threat of Neighborhood Gun Violence among Youth

In your neighborhood, how much of a problem is gun violence?	Blacks (%)	Whites (%)	Latinos (%)	All (%)
Big problem	10.3	0.9	5.6	3.4
Somewhat of a problem	20.2	6.5	18.3	11.1
Not much of a problem	30.1	27.6	37.3	30.2
Not a problem	39.4	65.0	38.8	55.4

Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, April/May 2013.

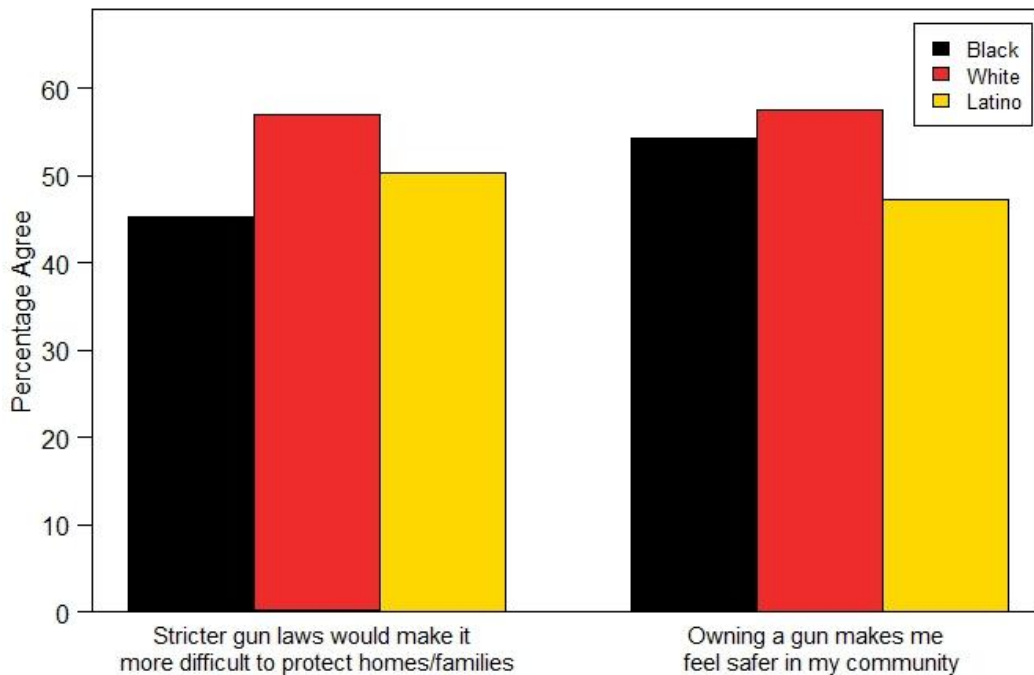
Gun Ownership and Personal Protection

Even though young people of color were much more likely to indicate that they were concerned about being victimized by gun violence and that gun violence is a problem in their neighborhood, these same populations do not believe that increased restrictions on gun ownership would reduce their personal safety. When comparing our results to a recent Pew study, we find that young people generally are less concerned that new gun restrictions will make it more difficult for people to protect their homes and families.² As Figure 1 shows below, relatively low percentages of Black (45.2 percent) and Latino (50.2 percent) youth—and only slightly higher percentages of white youth (56.9 percent)—believe that stricter gun laws would make it more difficult for people to protect their homes and families.

² See <http://www.people-press.org/2013/03/12/why-own-a-gun-protection-is-now-top-reason/#total>.

Furthermore, white youth are somewhat more likely to link gun ownership to feelings of safety in their community (57.6 percent) than either Black (54.2 percent) or Latino (47.3 percent) youth. On the whole, however, these figures suggest that young people—and especially young people of color—do not believe that increased restrictions on gun ownership would jeopardize their personal safety or security in their homes and neighborhoods.

Figure 1: Gun Ownership and Perceptions of Personal Safety among Youth



Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, April/May 2013.

Youth Beliefs about the Causes of Urban Gun Violence

Young people’s support for measures designed to reduce gun violence is inextricably linked to their perceptions of its causes. We asked young people to indicate what they believe are the *two most important contributors* to urban gun violence. The results are shown below in Table 5.

By and large, young people indicated that structural factors give rise to high levels of urban gun violence. More than three-fifths (61.6 percent) of youth reported that gangs and organized criminal activity are one of the two most important reasons

for high levels of gun violence in some cities, and a third (34.0 percent) of youth said that illegal drugs were to blame for urban gun violence. White youth in particular expressed especially high levels of support for these explanations (65.3 percent and 36.1 percent, respectively) compared with Black (55.1 and 27.7 percent) and Latino (55.4 and 32.0 percent) youth.

Similar percentages of Black (18.6 percent), white (16.5 percent), and Latino (19.1 percent) youth believed that the lack of adult supervision was an important contributor to urban gun violence, and impoverished neighborhoods were also reported to be a key factor by roughly equal numbers of Black (14.3 percent), white (17.0 percent), and Latino (10.3 percent) youth.

We find some important differences across racial groups, however, when examining several other explanations commonly discussed in the media and by policymakers. First, only 10.7 percent of white youth believed that urban gun violence is caused by too many guns in circulations, compared with 18.6 percent of Black youth and nearly a quarter (24.2 percent) of Latino youth. Black youth cited unemployment and lack of jobs as another important contributor to urban gun violence (15.9 percent), but white (9.6 percent) and Latino (8.2 percent) rated it as a less important factor.

On the whole, however, youth are somewhat reluctant to blame gun violence on violent television shows, movies, and video games (11.6 percent). And to echo some of the data from earlier, young people do not believe that restrictions on gun ownership by law-abiding citizens (for instance, in cities like Chicago) are an important reason for gun violence (6.0 percent). They also do not believe that ineffective policing (5.3 percent) is a key reason for high levels of urban gun violence.

Table 5: Youth Assessments of the Causes of Urban Gun Violence

Reason	Blacks (%)	Whites (%)	Latinos (%)	All (%)
Gangs and organized criminal activity	55.1	65.3	55.4	61.6
Illegal drugs	27.7	36.1	32.0	34.0
Lack of adult supervision for young people	18.6	16.5	19.1	17.4
Impoverished neighborhoods	14.3	17.0	10.3	15.1
Too many guns in circulation	18.6	10.7	24.2	14.9
Too many people with no respect for American values live in cities	15.8	11.5	13.0	12.4
Violence on television and in movies and video games	10.7	10.3	15.9	11.6
Unemployment/lack of jobs	15.9	9.6	8.2	10.2
Too many violent people live in cities	11.5	6.5	7.7	7.5
Too many restrictions on gun ownership by law-abiding citizens	2.4	7.8	3.2	6.0
Ineffective policing	4.9	5.3	5.6	5.3

Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, April/May 2013.

Race, Gun Control, and Stemming the Tide of Urban Gun Violence

As the data throughout this report indicate, young people are strongly supportive of initiatives that are designed to reduce gun violence. This support comes through most strongly from young people of color. Cities such as Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, and St. Louis have all experienced rushes of gun violence in recent years, and as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report, the victims of this violence have been disproportionately young (under 25 years of age) and persons of color.

Our study shows that young Blacks and Latinos are more likely than white youth to experience gun violence first- or second-hand, and that their neighborhoods are plagued by gun violence to a much greater degree. These lived experiences likely

lead young people of color to endorse increased gun control restrictions at a much higher rate than white youth.

On the other hand, the experiences of white youth also contribute to their views about gun control policy. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, white youth report carrying guns at a considerably higher rate than young people of color. This may explain why white youth are substantially more resistant to increasing restrictions on gun ownership.

Addressing the rising epidemic of gun violence requires understanding what contributes to it and what is possible given existing political constraints. Young people—and especially young people of color—have a powerful perspective to add to this important conversation. Their voices indicate a willingness to try a broad-based approach designed to reduce gun violence, including tough new restrictions on gun ownership. Moreover, young people also believe that addressing problems of gangs and organized criminal activity as well as reducing the stranglehold of illegal drugs on many urban communities will further help reign in the death and destruction brought about by gun violence on America's streets.

Methodology

The data for this project were collected by GfK Knowledge Networks. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and was fielded in April-May 2013. The target population consists of non-institutionalized African American, Latino, and White adults residing in the U.S. and between the ages of 18 and 29. Households were sampled by KnowledgePanel, a probability-based web panel that is designed to be representative of the U.S. population, yielding a sample size of 1,513 respondents.

Surveys were completed online. Households selected for the survey initially received an email announcing the availability of a new survey for them to take. After three days, email reminders were sent to those panel members that had not responded. Several days after that, panel members yet to respond were contacted by phone. Modest incentives were also offered to encourage participation. These procedures were followed until the desired sample size was achieved.

After the survey was fielded, the data are weighted so that the sample reflects the characteristics of the population of U.S. African American, Latino, and White adults between the ages of 18 and 29. These adjustments correct for any differences between the sample and the population that result from survey non-response as well as the oversampling of African Americans and Latinos. Demographic (i.e., gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, income) and geographic (i.e., census region, metropolitan area, primary language by census region) distributions from the most recent Current Population Studies were used as benchmarks in this adjustment.