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Half of Illinoisans Feel ‘Less Safe’ With Concealed Carry; Gun Control Support Softens

Since Illinois became the final state to pass a concealed-carry handgun law last summer, half of the state’s voters say they feel less safe than before, and about a third say they feel more safe, according to the latest statewide poll from the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University.

However, while still in the majority, support for gun control is down significantly from last year’s Simon Poll, which was conducted in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook school shooting, which took the lives of 20 first-graders and six adults.

This year’s survey, taken Feb. 12- 25, also found:

- Support for gun control had softened in the year that’s passed since the Sandy Hook shootings. For example, last year 59.5 percent said controlling gun ownership was more important than protecting the right to own guns. In the present survey, 53 percent chose controlling gun rights over protecting gun rights.
- There are 56.7 percent who said there should be exceptions to the concealed carry law—in such places as schools, college campuses, and movie theaters—compared to 71.3 percent who felt that way in the 2013 survey.
- Support for the idea of armed guards in schools has risen in the past year, from 46.3 percent in 2013 to 53.1 percent in the present survey.

“The poll illustrates just how evenly divided voters in Illinois are over gun-related issues,” said David Yepsen, the director of the Institute. “It’s little wonder policy makers have had such a difficult time trying to resolve these questions. In this latest survey, both sides can find support for parts of their cause.”

In the 2014 poll, the Simon Institute surveyed 1001 registered voters across Illinois, including 300 interviews via cell phone. The margin for error in the survey is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

The survey asked, “Now that Illinois has passed a law allowing registered, trained citizens to carry loaded handguns in public, do you feel more safe or less safe?” Over half (52.3 percent) of the registered voters in the survey said they feel less safe. Just under a third (31.8 percent) said they feel more safe. Another 12.9 percent said they felt neither more nor less safe.

Voters in the Chicago suburbs responded similarly to the statewide average, with 54.6 percent saying they felt less safe. Those in the City of Chicago were much more likely to say they felt less safe (64.5 percent). In downstate Illinois, opinion was evenly split, with 41.9 percent saying they felt more safe and 40.5 percent saying they felt less safe.

Simon Institute Visiting Professor Charlie Leonard, who supervised the poll, noted that high-profile, catastrophic events such as Sandy Hook can have a strong effect on opinion on public policy, but that effect wanes over time. “Illinois is a blue state, and a metropolitan state,” Leonard said, “and it’s not surprising that a majority still places a priority on controlling gun ownership over protecting gun rights. And, as long as there are no newsworthy mishaps associated with concealed carry, I suspect opposition to the law will continue to soften.”

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The 2014 Simon Poll interviewed 1,001 registered voters across Illinois. It has a margin for error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. This means that if we were to conduct the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances the results would vary by no more than plus or minus 3.5 percentage points from the results obtained here. The margin for error will be larger for demographic, geographic and response subgroups.

Live telephone interviews were conducted by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas. Cell phone interviews accounted for 30 percent of the sample. A Spanish language version of the questionnaire and a Spanish-speaking interviewer were made available. Customer Research International reports no Illinois political clients. The survey was paid for with non-tax dollars from the Institute’s endowment fund.

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Simon Poll Spring 2012
Response Frequencies on Gun Policy Questions

More or Less Safe after Concealed Carry

Now that Illinois has passed a law allowing registered trained citizens to carry loaded handguns in public, do you feel more safe or less safe?

More safe	31.8%
Less safe	52.3%
Neither/about the same (VOL)	12.9%
Other/Don't know	3.0%

Gun Rights vs. Gun Control

What do you think is more important? Protecting the right to own guns, or controlling gun ownership?

<u>Response</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>
Protecting the right to own guns	31.3%	41.5%
Controlling ownership	59.5%	53.0%
Other/Don't know	9.2%	5.6%

Exceptions to Concealed Carry

Do you believe there should be exceptions to allowing concealed weapons in public places—excluding them from such places as schools, college campuses, shopping malls, and movie theaters?

<u>Response</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>
Yes	71.3%	56.7%
No	20.7%	35.7%
Other/Don't know	8.0%	7.6%

Armed Guards in Schools

Do you favor or oppose putting more armed guards or police in schools?

<u>Response</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>
Favor	46.3%	53.1%
Oppose	44.8%	38.3%
Other/Don't know	8.8%	8.6%