

The Harms and Benefits Inventory

Jennifer Dineen and Kerri Raissian (UConn)
A Brief prepared by the UConn ARMS Center
December 2024

Successful uptake of firearm policy requires citizen-informed understanding of gun users' perceptions.

Researchers from the UConn Center for Advancing Research, Methods, and Scholarship in Gun Injury Prevention (**ARMS**) have developed the **Harms and Benefits Inventory (HBI)**¹ to assist policymakers and advocates in considering citizens' firearm policy perspectives. HBI data will soon be publicly available!

The successful implementation of policy often depends on citizens' behavior change. Evidence suggests that policies such as background checks², permitting³, waiting periods⁴, and Child Access Prevention Laws (CAP)⁵ reduce firearm injury and death. However, these policies require compliance by gun owners (e.g., willingness to register guns, use federally licensed dealers, secure storage), broad citizen support and depend on gun users' willingness to modify behavior to comply.

Background

In 2022, researchers from UConn ARMS and Johns Hopkins developed the Harms and Benefits Inventory (HBI), a policy-neutral measure that facilitates (1) assessment and understanding of citizens' perceptions of and anticipated policy positions on, firearm-related policies and practices aimed at improving uptake, and (2) assess perceived harms and benefits of specific policies or practices in a direct manner.

In 2024, two years after the [New York State Rifle & Pistol Assn, Inc. v. Bruen](#) (Bruen) decision, the UConn ARMS team collected a second wave of data to assess if, and to what extent, Americans perceptions of firearm policy outcomes as harmful or beneficial changed.

Method

- Data for wave 1 of the HBI is a nationally representative group of 2,004 Adults in the U.S. using the Social Science Research Solutions probability-based panel. The survey was administered online and by phone when requested from April 21 – May 15, 2022.
- Data for HBI wave 2 is a nationally representative sample of 3,086 U.S. Adults from Gallup's probability-based panel. The survey was administered online from October 28 – November 5, 2024. Both samples include both gun owners and non-owners.

- The surveys included the 21 item HBI measure, and questions about gun ownership, firearm-related behaviors, demographics, and experiences with violence and victimization. (See Table 1)
- The 2024 survey added measures of fear to proximal and distal events and a measure of policy support for increasing access to AR-15 style firearms.

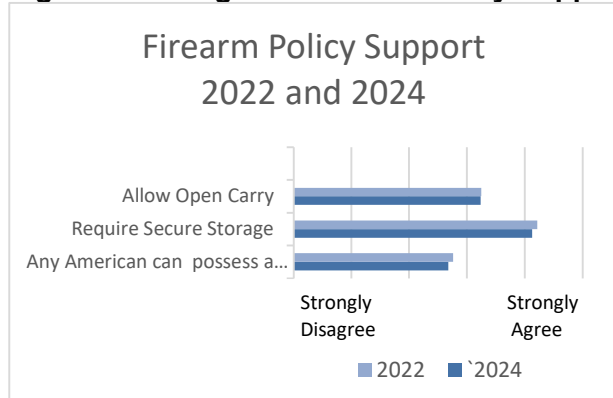
TABLE 1 THE FINAL 21-ITEM HARMS AND BENEFITS INVENTORY SURVEY

1. Increases the cost of ammunition	12. Requires a permit to purchase a gun
2. Increases the cost to purchase a gun	13. Makes it easier to purchase a gun without a permit
3. Reduces the number of available licensed gun dealers	14. Requires gun users to receive continuing education around gun safety
4. Makes it more difficult to drive across state lines with a gun	15. Requires new gun owners to demonstrate knowledge of gun safety
5. Increases the time it takes a person to get to and ready a gun in their home	16. Allows a person with a history of violent behavior to obtain a gun
6. Increases government regulation of how guns are handled	17. Allows a person with a domestic violence conviction to obtain a gun
7. Makes it more difficult for a person convicted of violent misdemeanors, such as simple assault to own a gun	18. Allows a person with serious mental health problems to obtain a gun
8. Makes it more difficult for a person with minor, non-violent legal offenses to own a gun	19. Allows a person with a felony conviction to obtain a gun
9. Makes it more difficult for a person convicted of domestic violence to own a gun	20. Makes it easier to participate in hobbies such as gun collection and restoration
10. Makes it more difficult for a person with serious mental health problems to own a gun	21. Makes it easier to participate in shooting sports
11. Makes it more difficult for a person with mild mental health problems to own a gun	

Key Findings

- **Reports of gun ownership increase.** As CT reports issuing record numbers of firearm permits, the HBI surveys shows US adults reporting increased firearm ownership. The 2022 survey found 9% of gun owners report becoming a first time owner between 2020 and 2022. In 2024, that number is 4%. In addition to seeing ownership increase among 18-39 yr olds, 8% report becoming owners within the last 2 years, women (6%) are more likely than men (3%) to report becoming gun owners. Reports of new ownership were higher for Hispanic (9%) and Black (7%) respondents than for their White counterparts (2%). This trend is similar to 2022 data.
- **2022 and 2024 studies show similar levels of support for policies** requiring secure storage, allowing open carry, and that promote allowing any American to own a gun. In both studies, respondents in gun households were more likely to agree that any American can own a gun and that people legal gun owners should be able to open carry. These respondents are less likely to agree that people should be required to store guns securely.

Figure 1: Changes in Firearm Policy Support



- **Citizen support does not equal policy uptake.** Support for secure firearm storage is strong, averaging 4.13 nationally and 4.38 in states that receive an A firearm law rating from Giffords⁸ (CT, CA, and NJ). Despite strong support for secure storage, in 2024 nationally 46% of firearm households report keeping at least 1 gun loaded and unlocked on their property. This number is even higher among America’s service members (56%) and veterans (58%).
- The 2024 survey investigates citizen perceptions of policy that makes AR-15 style weapons more accessible. **On average, Americans oppose a policy that makes AR-15 style weapons more accessible as harmful.** On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means completely oppose and 10 means completely support, respondents gave this policy an average rating at 3.49. Respondents in gun-owning households’ owners are more likely to view the policy as neutral (4.81) than those living in households without a gun owner (2.31). Respondents in states with an A firearm rating from Gifford are similar (3.37) to their counterparts in other states.

Funding Provided By: National Collaborative on Gun Violence Research (Wave 1), Missouri Foundation for Health (Wave 1), Arnold Ventures (Wave 2 and data portal), and UConn’s OVPR. All errors are the authors and these do not necessarily represent the views of the funders.

Understanding citizen perception of policy impact can inform policy development and improve implementation.

Insight as to how citizens view policy as harmful or beneficial, and their rationale for support or opposition can improve uptake and reduce unintended consequences of these policies. To aid policy makers in accessing this information, **UConn ARMS will make this data available to policy makers in 2025!**

Data will be available via a data portal that will provide aggregate means and limited ability to segment the data. Future plans include also providing datasets upon request.

1. Grasso, D., Raissian, K.M., Doucette, M., McGuire, A.B., Dineen, J.N. (2024). The Harms and Benefits Inventory (HBI): Initial Validation of a Novel Assessment of Perceived Harms and Benefits of Firearm Policies and Practices. *Injury Prevention*, 30(6), 474-480. <https://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/30/6/474>
2. Crifasi, C., McCourt, A., & Webster, D. (2019). *THE IMPACT OF HANDGUN PURCHASER LICENSING ON GUN VIOLENCE*. Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Prevention and Policy. <https://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-gun-violence-prevention-and-policy/docs/impact-of-handgun-purchaser-licensing.pdf>
3. Vernick, J. S., Alcorn, T., & Horwitz, J. (2017). Background Checks for all Gun Buyers and Gun Violence Restraining Orders: State Efforts to Keep Guns from High-Risk Persons. *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, 45(S1), 98–102. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1073110517703344>
4. Luca, M., Malhotra, D., & Poliquin, C. (2017). Handgun waiting periods reduce gun deaths. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(46), 12162–12165. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1619896114>
5. Cummings, P. (1997). State Gun Safe Storage Laws and Child Mortality Due to Firearms. *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278(13), 1084. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.1997.03550130058037>
6. Crifasi, C. K., Doucette, M. L., McGinty, E. E., Webster, D. W., & Barry, C. L. (2018). Storage Practices of US Gun Owners in 2016. *American Journal of Public Health*, 108(4), 532–537. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304262>
7. McCourt, A., & Vernick, J. (2018). Law, Ethics, and Conversations between Physicians and Patients about Firearms in the Home. *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 20(1), 69–76. <https://doi.org/10.1001/journalofethics.2018.20.1.hlaw1-1801>
8. Giffords allots laws and policies point values based on their strengths or weaknesses, then ranks each state and assign letter grades, ranging from A, states with the strongest gun laws, through F, states with the weakest gun laws.

Contact Us:

Kerri Raissian (Director): kerri.raissian@uconn.edu
Jennifer Dineen (Assoc. Director): jennifer.dineen@uconn.edu
Twitter/X: [@UConn_ARMS](https://twitter.com/UConn_ARMS)
Bluesky: [uconnarms.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/uconnarms.bsky.social)
Website: arms.chip.uconn.edu