



Badger Poll™ #11, Release #2
University of Wisconsin Survey Center
University of Wisconsin Madison
November 3, 2003

NOTE: When using material from this release please cite the Badger Poll™ conducted by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center, paid for by private funds at the University. The Capital Times (Madison) and the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel are the poll's media sponsors.

GUNS, GUN CONTROL AND CONCEALED CARRY
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

A number of questions related to gun control in general and the matter of allowing carrying of concealed weapons in particular have been debated recently in Wisconsin. In order to gauge public opinion on some of the related dimensions, the most recent Badger Poll™ telephoned a randomly selected sample of Wisconsin residents and asked them a series of questions. Answers depended very much on what facet of the issue was being tapped.

If the issue is framed as limiting carrying a handgun to those with law enforcement or security responsibilities, the Wisconsin public is torn. Specifically by a close 53%-46% split, the public agrees that "no one but police and people like private detectives or security guards should be allowed to carry a handgun". The overall split carries over into a number of demographic groups, although each tends to come down a bit more clearly on one side or the other.

Thus, by a five to four margin, men oppose this idea while women, by a three to two margin, agree with it. The youngest respondents are less positive (five to four against) while the next older group is evenly split and moving up the age ladder to the final two categories finds a narrow majority in favor rising to more than two to one backing among those sixty and older. As groups, Democrats tend to agree with Independents (each agreeing by four to three or so), while Republicans disagree with this notion narrowly. The point is that for all groups a relatively substantial proportion comes down on the opposite side from the typical member.

Not every gun related question finds the public this split, of course. In response to the idea "no one should be allowed to buy a handgun without a check to make sure they have no criminal record". Overall, some 98% of the public agrees with this notion, and the lowest level of support found in any of the groups examined is only 96%.

When a somewhat greater level of restriction (and one which is not currently part of Wisconsin law) is on the table -- that "anyone who wants to own a handgun should have to get a permit from the police" -- near unanimity disappears for a three to one (76%-23%) majority.

Groups do not display quite the same pattern of relative position as was evident on the question of restricting carrying weapons. To be sure women are more in favor than men (seven in eight, compared to two thirds). But partisan differences are essentially non-existent. Except for those over sixty, the other three age groups are quite similar.

A final general perception lies behind all the debates on gun control and the efficacy or advisability of certain measures. Almost nineteen out of twenty state residents agree that "no matter what the gun laws are, criminals will always find a way to get guns". What this suggests is that -- if the aim of gun control measures of one sort or another is to reduce violence and crime -- the public will want to see WHY a given measure will be expected to impact criminals as well as law abiding citizens.

Respondents were reminded of the current status of gun control laws ("In Wisconsin, no special permit is required to own a handgun, but there is a forty-eight hour waiting period and a background check before someone can purchase a handgun from a dealer"). They then were asked the general question whether this was too much, too little or about the right amount of control of handgun purchases. Very, very few (3%) felt this was too restrictive, but the remainder split pretty evenly between those who felt there was too little control (45%) and those who felt it was about right (51%). This can be interpreted as a general view of whether tightening of controls would be advisable, and the public narrowly breaks AGAINST it.

By about three to two men feel existing controls are appropriate, while women narrowly on balance look to tighter controls. Democrats and Republicans are roughly symmetric, with the former favoring tightening by about three to two while the latter prefers leaving things as they are by about the same margin. Independents as a group divide almost exactly evenly. The three youngest age groups split pretty close to exactly evenly on tightening versus maintaining the existing level of control. Those sixty and above feel controls are adequate by about three to two. Overall then there is a constituency, falling short of a majority, that would prefer gun control to be stricter (at least as regards purchase), and there is a substantial amount of disagreement within groups.

Turning more specifically to the matter of "concealed carry", we began by reminding respondents that "right now, ordinary citizens are not allowed to carry concealed weapons in Wisconsin under any circumstances" but that there is a "proposal to allow people who can legally own handguns to carry concealed weapons in most public places". The response found seven in ten (69%) against this idea, and just over one in four (27%) in favor.

Women as a group (79%-16%) come closest to a onesided position. Men are more evenly split (58%-38%). Democrats as a group are most opposed, Independents slightly less so, while Republicans come down just under two to one against on the general question. Opposition is weakest among the youngest, strongest among the oldest.

Of course, no single question can capture all the nuances of an actual bill (what are "most public places", for instance). And the question did not specifically mention required training. But, while the proposed measures would require paying for a permit, they also make issuance of the permit essentially non-discretionary providing one pays the fee and gets the training.

It may be that this aspect of the proposals are what causes a problem for some. There is clearly support for people having to demonstrate a need for carrying a concealed weapon. "If concealed weapons are allowed, do you think people should have to prove a special reason why they should carry a weapon, or should any law abiding citizen be able to get a permit to carry a concealed weapon." Just shy of three in four (72%) require showing special cause. One in four would back allowing any law abiding citizen to get a permit.

Women are somewhat more likely than men to back requirement of showing why a concealed weapon is necessary. Democrats are most likely to favor this, and Republicans least. There are quite modest age based differences.

The electoral impact of a change in state law would depend, naturally, on what other issues there were in a race, and on the precise nature of the actual law. But the public disposition is not especially favorable, although limited. "Suppose a state legislator who was running for re-election voted in favor of a law to allow ordinary residents to carry concealed weapons". One in eight said this would make them either much more (4%) or somewhat more (8%) likely to vote for such a person. Half said it would make them either somewhat (24%) or much (27%) less likely. But one in three (34%) said it would not make much difference.

The public is not clear on what the effect of allowing concealed carry might be. To be sure, the largest single group (44%) overall, thinks that "if people were allowed to carry concealed weapons" the crime rate would increase. But this is partially counterbalanced by the 17% who think concealed carry would decrease the crime rate. It is diluted by the almost four in ten (37%) who think it would not make much difference.

Here there are some group differences. Men tend to see little net impact (31% increase, 25% decrease with concealed carry), but women rather clearly (56% to 9%) think crime would increase rather than decrease. More than four times as many Democrats expect an increase in crime with concealed carry as expect a decrease. This ratio drops to a bit over two to one among Independents and rather under that for Republicans. The youngest respondents are somewhat more likely than their older counterparts to expect an increase in crime.

One's reaction to concealed carry relates sharply to the expected impact on the crime rate. Among those who believe concealed carry would increase the crime rate, the very broad question allowing legal gun owners to carry concealed weapons in most public places comes in for strong (92%-7%) opposition, while the idea of requiring showing of special need if concealed weapons are allowed is also onesidedly backed (by 89%-7%). Among those who do not expect much impact on crime one way or the other, the direction of opinion is the same, but the balance is less clear (64%-28% against the basic notion, 67%-28% for having to show a need if concealed carry is permitted at all).

But sentiment among the group which thinks concealed carry would DECREASE the crime rate is another matter. By 77%-19% this group favors the notion of legal gun owners being able to carry concealed weapons in most public places. By 68%-28% they oppose requiring a showing of special need to get a permit for concealed weapons.

Correlation is not causation, so one cannot be certain whether one's view of the impact of concealed carry shapes one's reaction to the idea, or vice versa. But the expected impact is an important facet of overall opinion on this subject and it is one on which there is not presently a consensus.

The question of impact of gun regulation is murkier if one changes the focus to measures designed "to make it harder for ordinary citizen to purchase and own handguns". Six in ten (62%) would not expect much difference in the crime rate one way or the other. Just under one in four (23%) think the crime rate would be reduced, but almost one in six (15%) think it would increase if gun ownership were made more difficult. There are no clear differences based on age or gender. On balance Democrats thought that if there were an impact, it was more likely to bring about a decrease, while Republicans had no net expectation, but

the largest proportion of all three groups expected tightening of controls on gun ownership to not make much difference.

Overall, then, save for supporting background checks for gun purchase and suspicion that criminals will find a way to get guns no matter what the law is, issues of gun control in general and concealed carry more particularly fail to find consensus in Wisconsin. The public seems especially torn about whether the existing level of control on ownership is sufficient or not, and doubts (on balance) that it would affect the crime rate much. There is a constituency, though a minority one, for a very permissive concealed carry regime. But there appears to be substantial sentiment that citizens wanting to carry concealed weapons should have to demonstrate a need to do so, rather than simply being accorded an automatic permission to carry such weapons.

Statewide Marginals and Percentages for Key Groups

What follows is the exact question wording for each of the items referred to in the release. All results shown are for the basic sample of state residents. The first column is the percentage of the entire sample giving each response. The second and third reports the percentages for men and women separately. The fourth, fifth, and sixth columns show self-described Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. Columns seven through ten group respondents by age.

Q01. INTERVIEWER: (DO NOT ASK) Enter respondent's gender

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
MALE	49%	100%	--%	43%	48%	58%	53%	54%	46%	43%
FEMALE	51	--	100	57	52	42	47	46	54	57

CARRY01. Would you agree or disagree with the following statements. No one but police and people like private detectives or security guards should be allowed to carry a handgun.

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
AGREE	53%	44%	60%	58%	57%	46%	43%	49%	52%	68%
DISAGREE	46	55	37	41	42	53	55	50	46	30
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	--	1
REFUSED	1	--	1	1	1	--	--	--	1	1

CARRY03. No one should be allowed to buy a handgun without a check to make sure they have no criminal record.

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
AGREE	98%	97%	99%	98%	100%	97%	96%	97%	99%	100%
DISAGREE	2	3	1	2	--	3	4	3	1	--
DON'T KNOW	*	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	--
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	1	--	--

CARRY04. Anyone who wants to own a handgun should have to get a permit from the police.

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
AGREE	76%	63%	88%	79%	73%	73%	76%	72%	71%	86%
DISAGREE	23	36	11	20	25	27	24	26	29	11
DON'T KNOW	1	2	1	1	2	1	--	2	1	3
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

CARRY05. No matter what the gun laws are, criminals will always find a way to get guns.

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
AGREE	94%	93%	96%	94%	92%	95%	92%	93%	95%	98%
DISAGREE	5	6	4	5	8	5	8	7	6	2
DON'T KNOW	*	1	--	1	--	--	--	1	--	--
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

CARRY06. In Wisconsin, no special permit is required to own a handgun, but there is a forty-eight hour waiting period and a background check before someone can purchase a handgun from a dealer. Do you think this is too much control, too little, or about the right amount of control for handgun purchases?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
TOO MUCH	3%	5%	1%	3%	3%	4%	10%	1%	3%	1%
TOO LITTLE	45	37	53	57	49	37	43	49	48	37
ABOUT RIGHT	51	58	45	40	49	59	46	49	49	60
DON'T KNOW	1	--	1	--	--	1	1	1	--	2
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

CARRY07. Right now, ordinary citizens are not allowed to carry concealed firearms in Wisconsin under any circumstances, but there is a proposal to allow people who can legally own handguns to carry concealed weapons in most public places. In general do you favor or oppose this proposal.

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVOR	27%	38%	16%	20%	24%	35%	38%	25%	27%	19%
OPPOSE	69	58	79	77	71	59	59	68	69	75
FAVOR SPEC. PERMIT	2	2	1	2	1	--	3	1	2	1
DON'T KNOW	3	2	5	1	3	6	--	6	2	4
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

CARRY08. If concealed weapons are allowed, do you think people should have to prove a special reason why they should carry a weapon, or should any law abiding citizen be able to get a permit to carry a concealed weapon?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
SPECIAL PERMIT	72%	65%	78%	81%	75%	64%	68%	73%	71%	78%
ALLOW ANYONE TO CARRY	24	32	16	17	19	31	32	22	24	18
DON'T KNOW	4	3	5	2	4	4	--	5	3	3
REFUSED	1	1	1	--	2	1	--	*	2	1

CARRY09. Suppose a state legislator who was running for re-election voted in favor of a law to allow ordinary residents to carry concealed weapons. Would this make you much more likely to vote for him, somewhat more likely, somewhat LESS likely, much LESS likely, or wouldn't it make much difference to you?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
MUCH MORE LIKELY	4%	7%	2%	2%	6%	6%	8%	5%	5%	1%
SOMEWHAT MORE LIKELY	8	13	3	6	5	14	9	8	9	7
SOMEWHAT LESS LIKELY	24	23	25	36	20	20	32	25	23	22
MUCH LESS LIKELY	27	19	35	33	34	18	20	27	26	35
NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE	34	37	32	23	32	39	31	33	37	32
DON'T KNOW	2	1	3	--	3	3	1	2	1	3
REFUSED	*	*	*	1	--	--	--	--	--	1

CARRY10. If people were allowed to carry concealed weapons, do you think this would increase the crime rate, reduce it, or not make much difference?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
INCREASE CRIME RATE	44%	31%	56%	53%	40%	36%	50%	44%	41%	43%
REDUCE IT	17	25	9	12	17	21	16	23	15	11
NOT MCH DIFFERENCE	37	41	32	35	40	39	34	31	41	43
DON'T KNOW	2	3	2	--	4	4	--	2	3	3
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	*

CARRY11. And if the law were changed to make it harder for ordinary citizens to purchase and own handguns, would that increase the crime rate, reduce it, or not make much difference?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
INCREASE CRIME RATE	15%	16%	13%	12%	15%	17%	14%	15%	15%	13%
REDUCE IT	23	21	24	33	21	14	22	21	22	26
NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE	62	62	61	55	61	68	63	63	61	58
DON'T KNOW	1	1	2	*	4	1	--	1	1	3
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

QD05. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or something else?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
DEMOCRAT	30%	27%	33%	100%	--%	--%	28%	28%	32%	33%
REPUBLICAN	30	36	25	--	--	100	41	30	25	28
INDEPENDENT	21	21	21	--	100	--	8	21	25	26
OTHER	11	10	12	--	--	--	13	10	14	6
NONE	6	6	5	--	--	--	6	9	2	4
DON'T KNOW	1	--	1	--	--	--	1	1	1	--
REFUSED	2	1	3	--	--	--	2	1	1	3

QD11. In what year were you born? (ENTER FOUR-DIGIT YEAR) (Calculated and grouped as below)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
18-29	15%	17%	14%	14%	6%	21%	100%	--%	--%	--%
30-44	31	34	28	29	31	31	--	100	--	--
45-59	30	29	32	32	37	25	--	--	100	--
60 and over	21	18	23	23	26	20	--	--	--	100
DK/REFUSED	3	2	3	2	1	3	--	--	--	--

* denotes less than .5%

-- denotes 0%

HOW THE POLL WAS DONE

This BADGER POLL™ was conducted by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center as part of its ongoing program of research designed to benefit the research community and the people of Wisconsin, under the direction of G. Donald Ferree, Jr., Associate Director for Public Opinion Research of the Center. The media sponsors of the survey are the (Madison) Capital Times, and the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel. The BADGER POLL™ is intended to be a "poll of record" for the state, investigating matters of concern to Wisconsinites including politics, culture, and their daily lives, adhering to the highest standards of polling methodology and rigorous independence.

A total of 511 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between October 21 and 28, inclusive. Telephone numbers were generated by computer in proportion to the number of adults living in each area of the state. Theoretically, results from this survey have a "margin of error" of a little over +/- 4%. This means that, had we asked every eligible resident in Wisconsin, exactly these questions at the time the survey was conducted, there is only a one in twenty chance that the answers would differ by more than that in either direction from what we report here. There could be differences because of changes in question wording, events occurring in the meantime, or any of the practical difficulties involved in taking a scientific survey. Results based on subgroups are subject to a larger "margin of error".