

# Under Fire: Understanding oppositional positions on gun control

Jennifer Gibbs

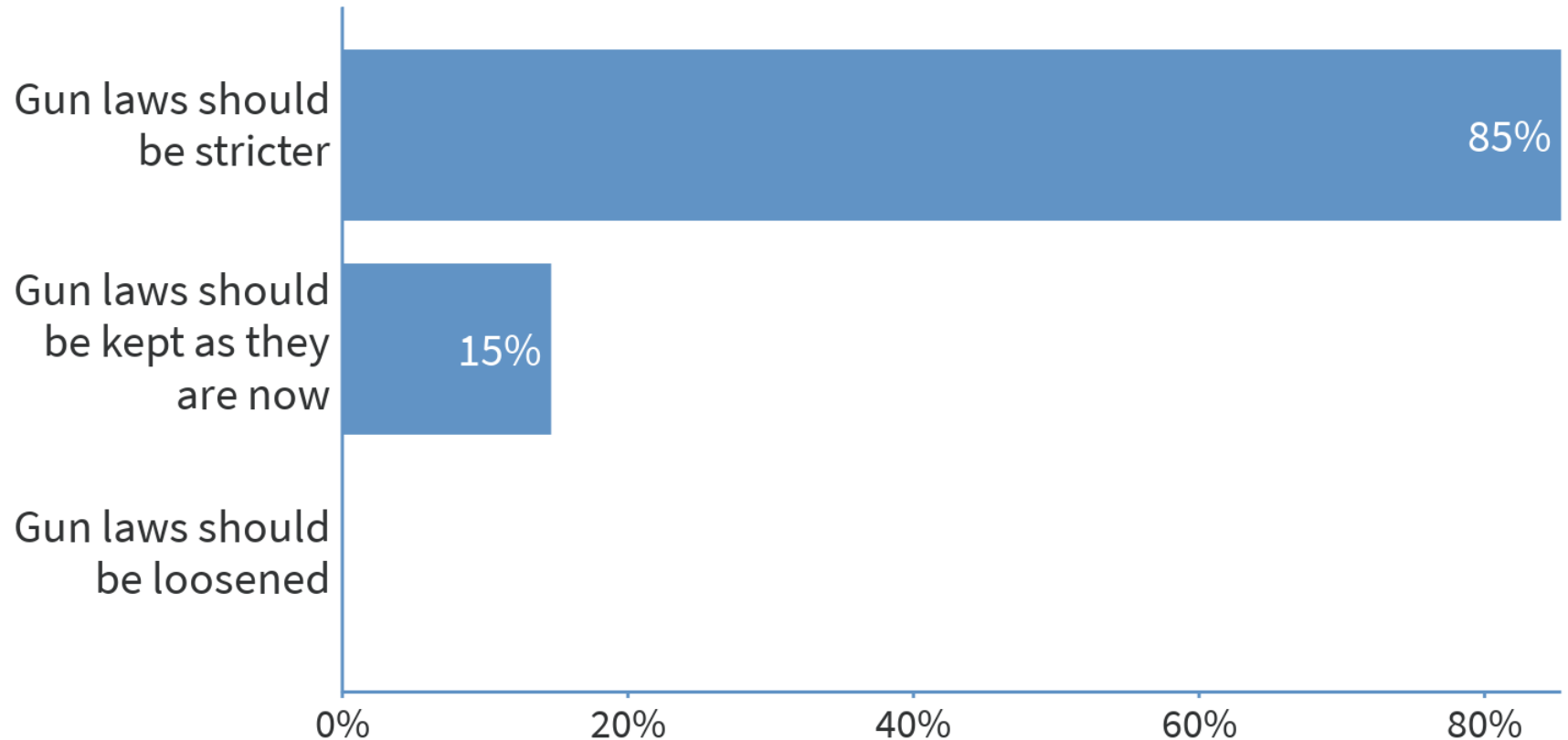
Tara Reis



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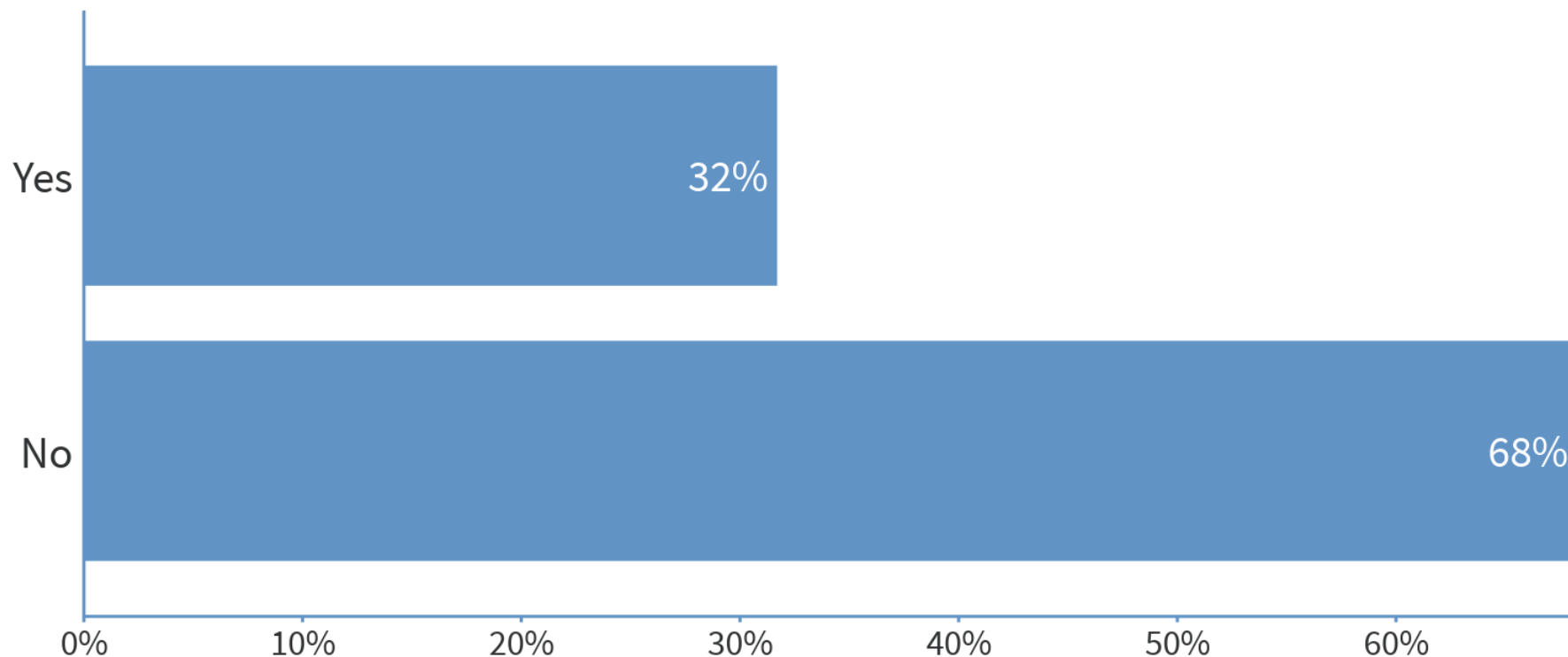
## What is your position on gun control?

**i** Poll is full and no longer accepting responses



## Does your position change if the question asked something different (e.g., firearms sales laws; ban on assault weapons only)?

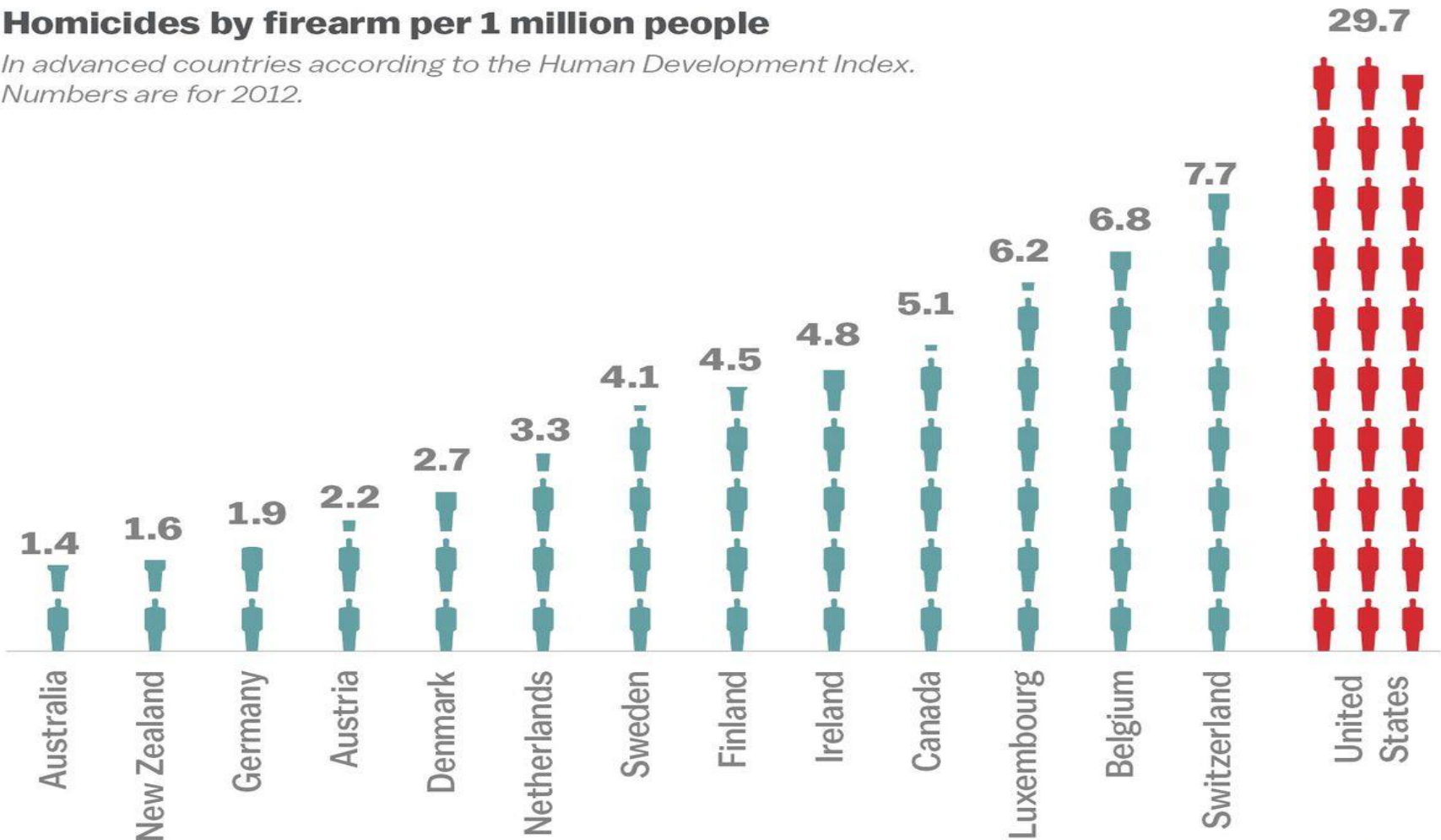
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# Gun violence is a problem in the US.

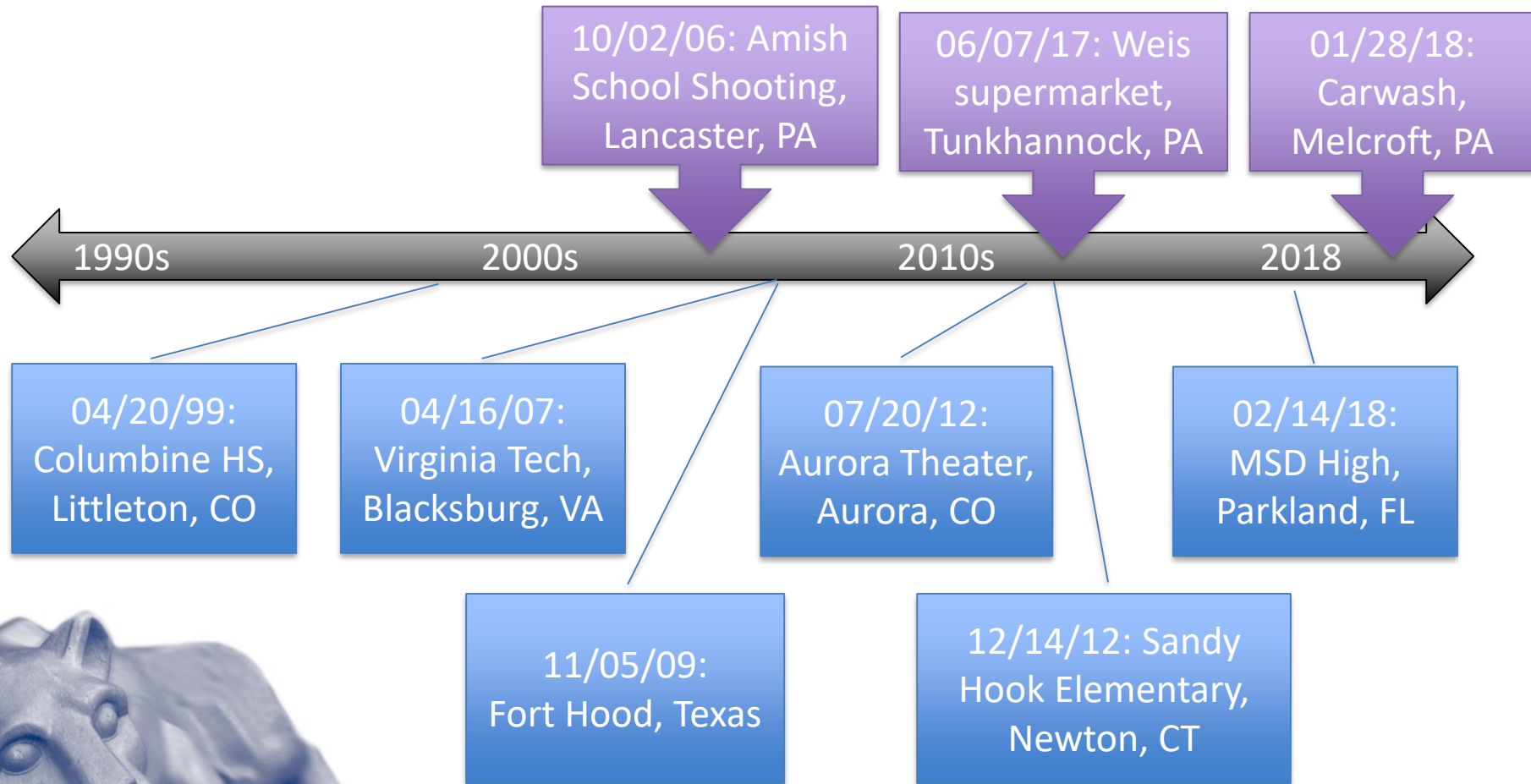
## Homicides by firearm per 1 million people

*In advanced countries according to the Human Development Index.  
Numbers are for 2012.*



SOURCE: UNODC, Small Arms Survey, via The Guardian.

# Timeline of selected mass shootings

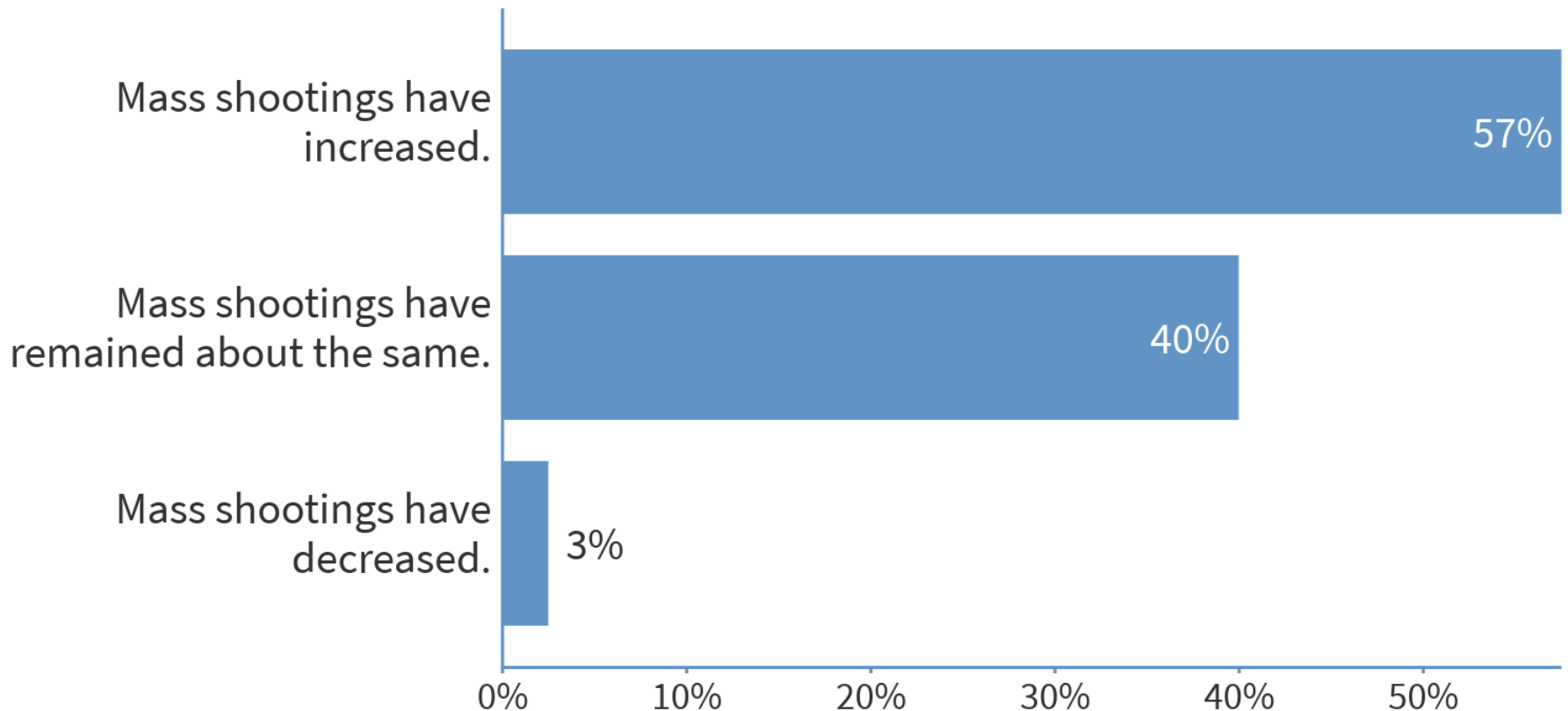


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Source: Mother Jones, 2018

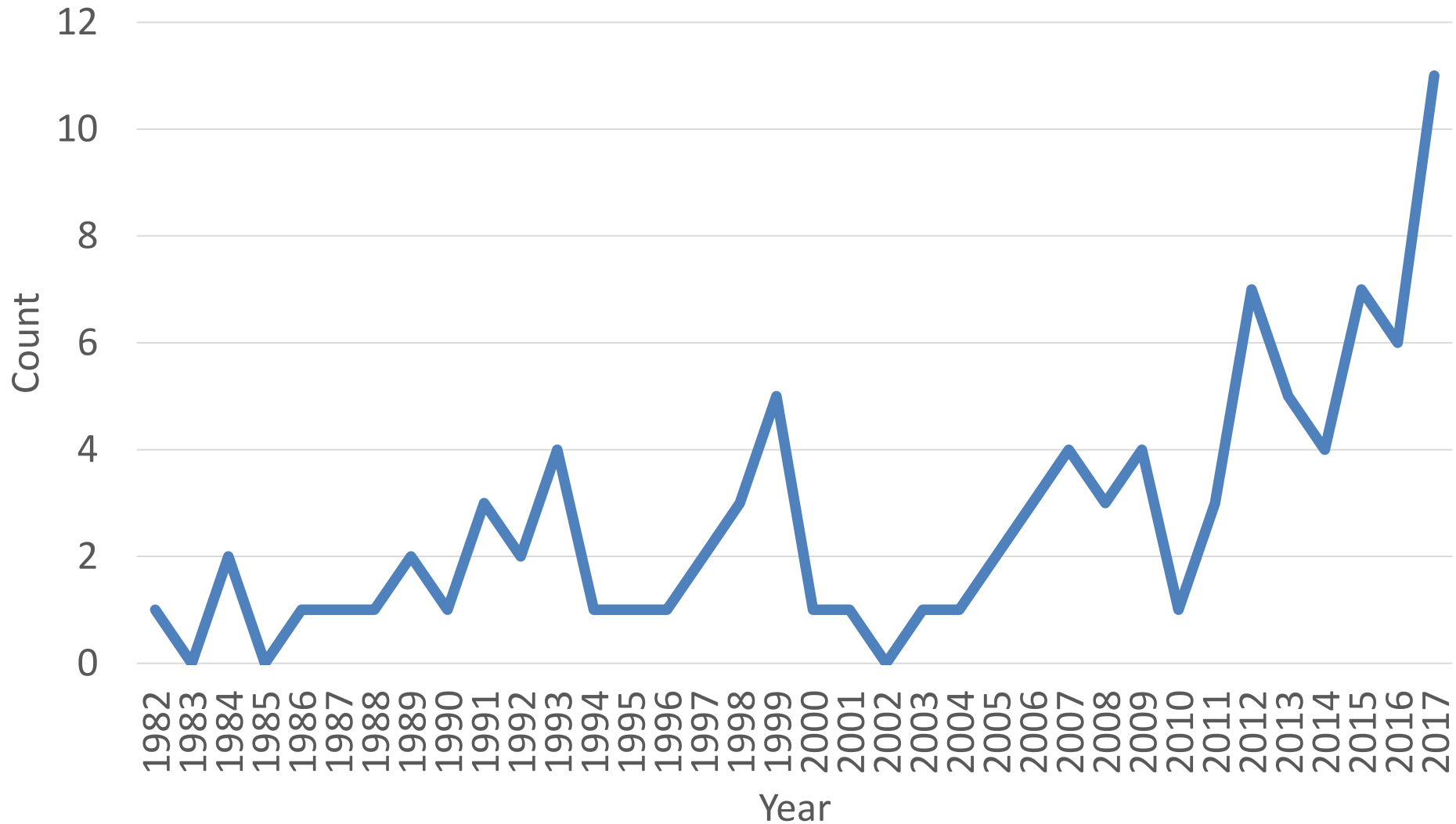
## What is the trend in US mass shootings in recent years?

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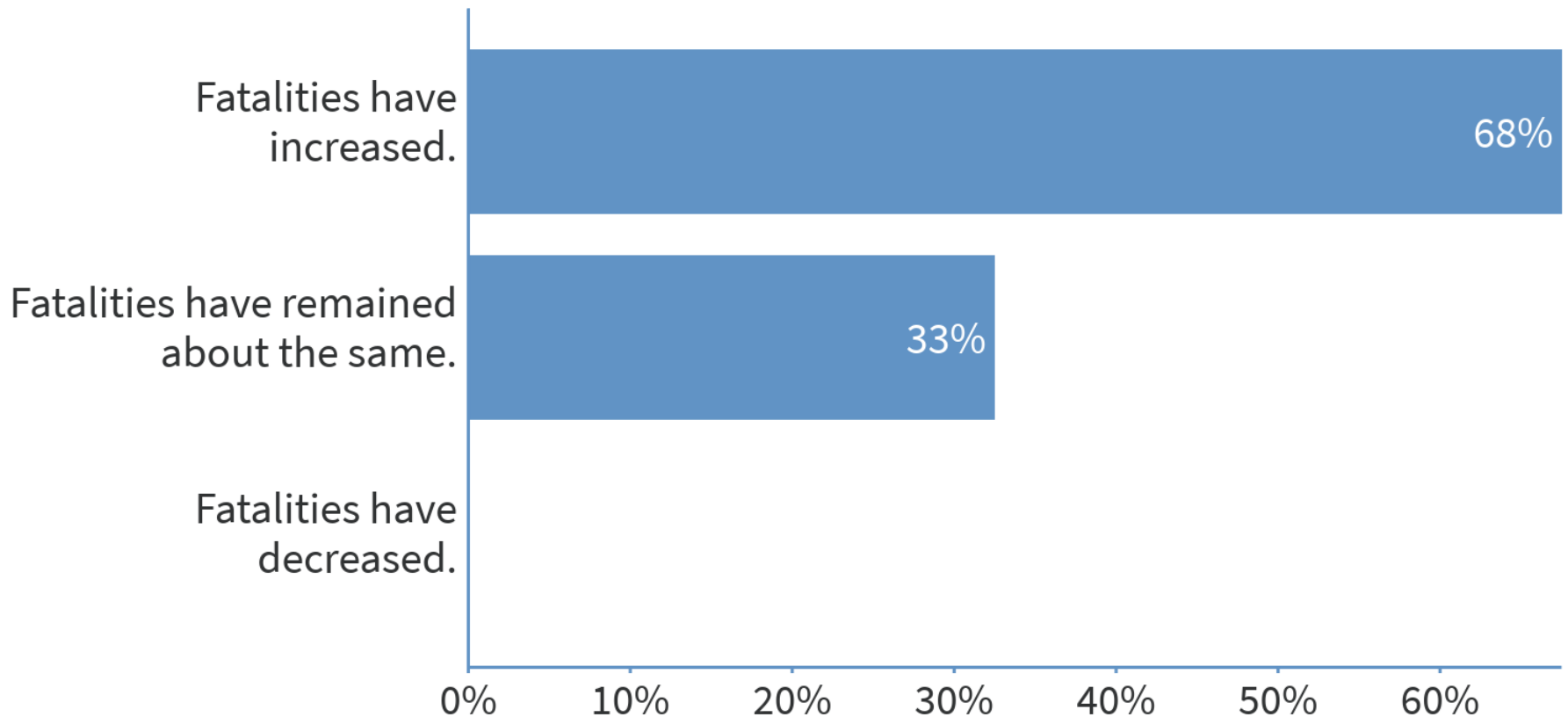
# Number of mass shootings per year, 1982-2017

(Source: Mother Jones, 2018)



## What is the trend in FATALITIES from mass shootings in recent years?

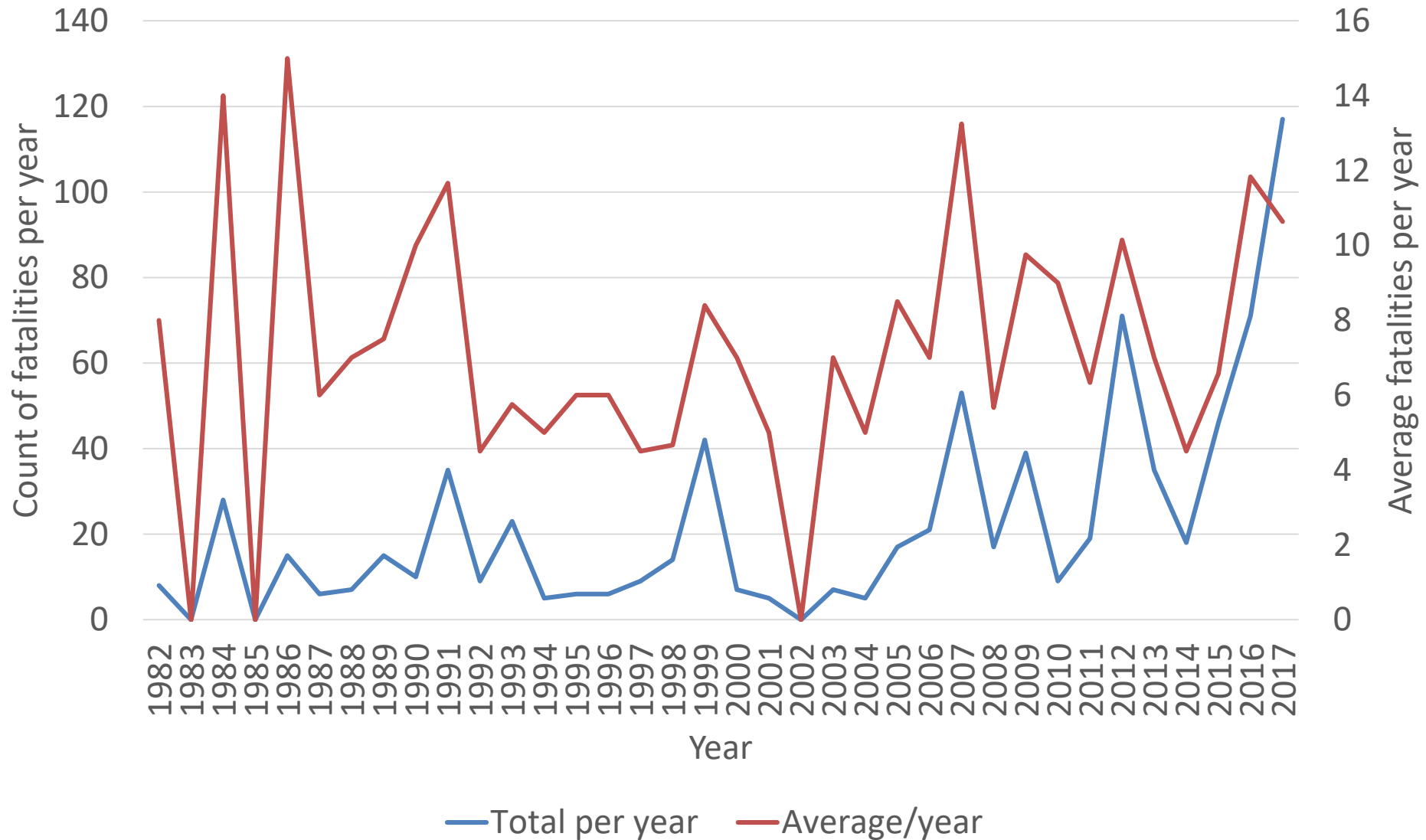
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# Number of mass shootings fatalities per year, 1982-2017

(Source: Mother Jones, 2018)



# Parkland movement → sustained conversation about gun control



#Never Again

#Stand Second

Source: <http://time.com/>

# Vitriol because 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment interpretation is debated.

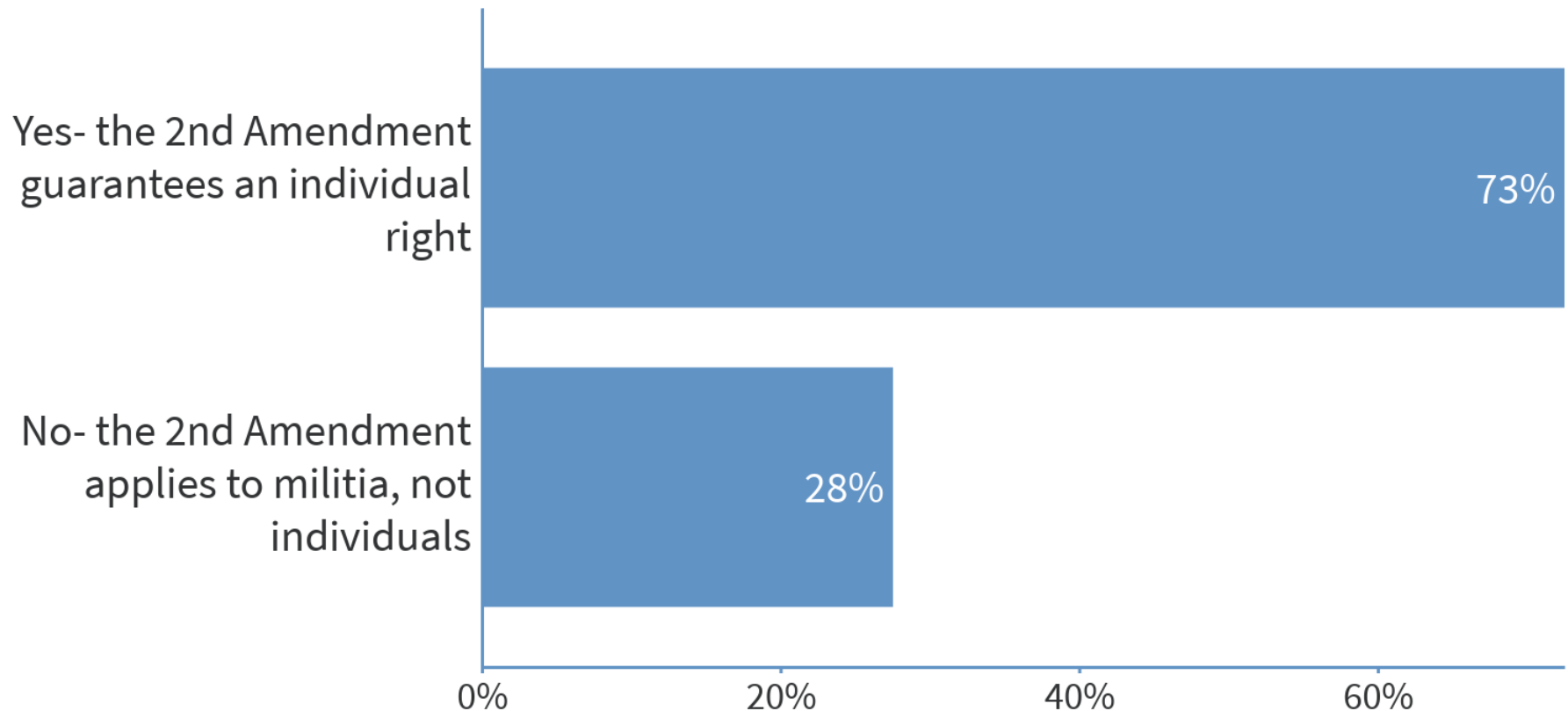
A well regulated **Militia**,  
being necessary to the  
security of a free State,  
the **right of the people to  
keep and bear Arms**, shall  
not be infringed.



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## Do you think the 2nd Amendment gives \*individuals\* the right to firearms?

**i** Poll is full and no longer accepting responses



# Supreme Court interpreted 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment as individual right

- *DC v. Heller* (2008):  
Affirmed 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment right to own handgun for self-defense
- *McDonald v. City of Chicago* (2010):  
Applied to states
- 95% *post-Heller* 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment claims failed





# But, lawmakers struggle to pass “sensible” firearms policies

- Difficulty stems from emotionally-charged public opinions on gun control
  - Recognizing opposing arguments can be challenging
- Understanding how citizens approach controversial debates is important
  - to advance less polarizing climate regarding gun control policy
  - to offer legislators an avenue for uniting citizenry



# Purpose of study

To determine whether and how  
citizens understand  
others' opposing viewpoints  
on gun control



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# PUBLIC OPINIONS ON GUN CONTROL



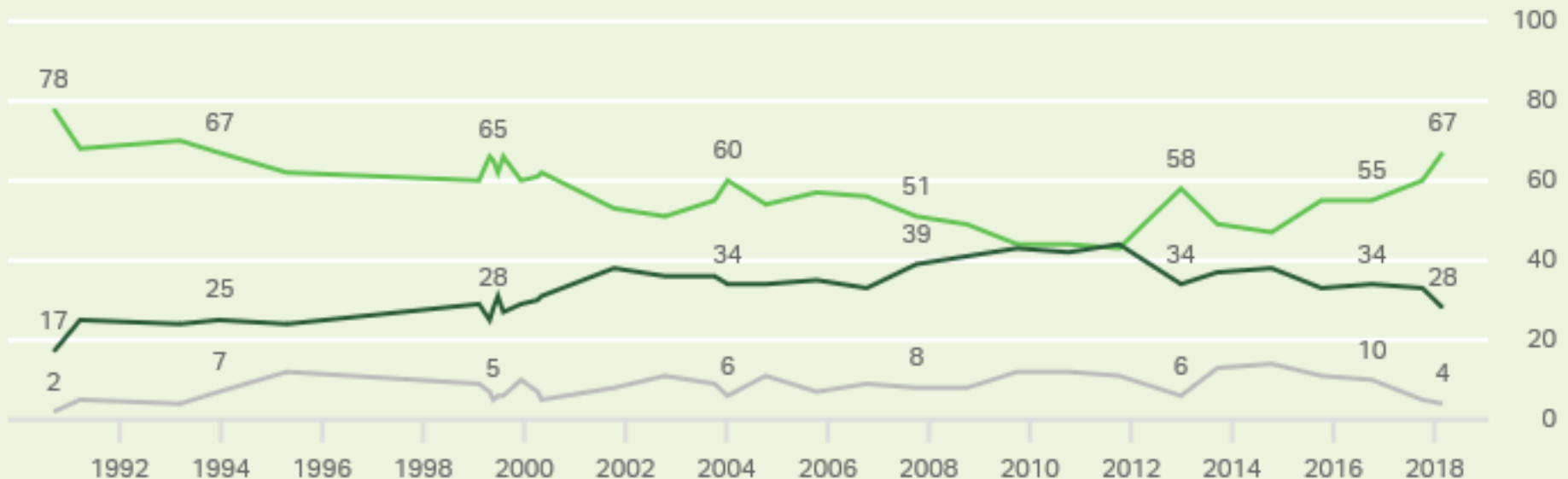
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# According to Gallup poll, US support for stricter gun sales laws highest since 1993

In general, do you feel that the laws covering the sale of firearms should be made more strict, less strict or kept as they are now?

■ % More strict ■ % Kept as they are ■ % Less strict

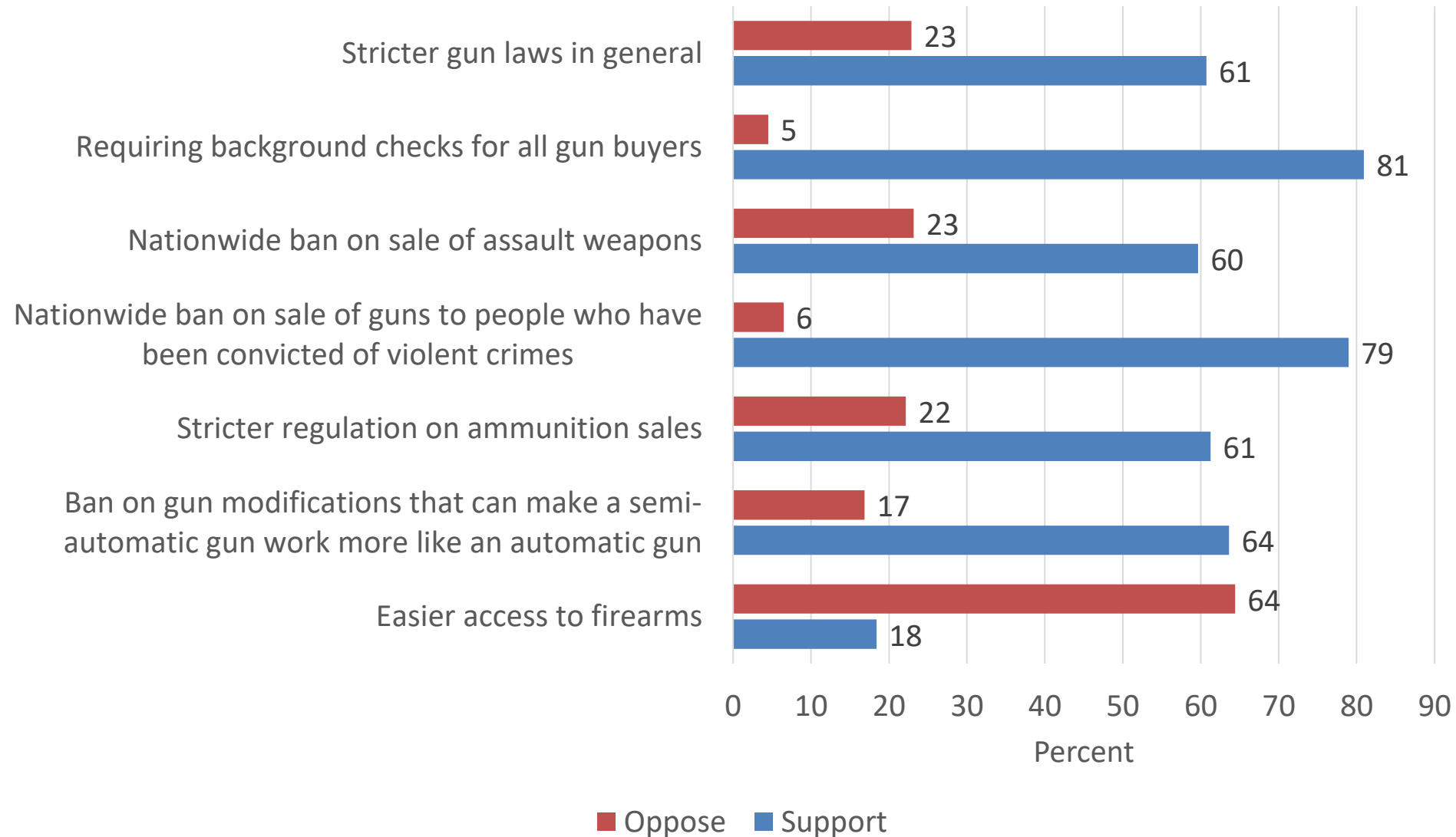


GALLUP

Source: <http://news.gallup.com/poll/229562/preference-stricter-gun-laws-highest-1993.aspx>

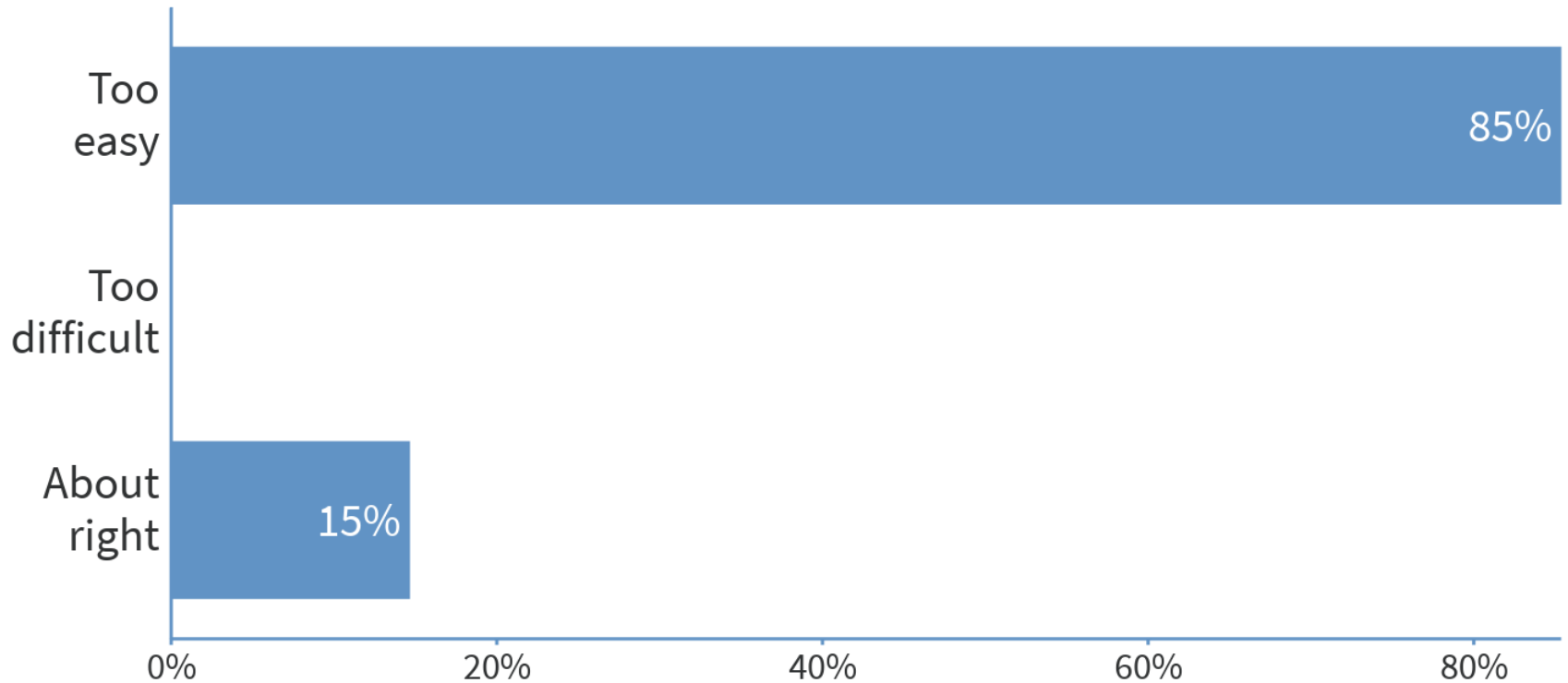
# PA also supports stricter gun laws:

LionPoll 2017 (*n*'s= 1318-1438)



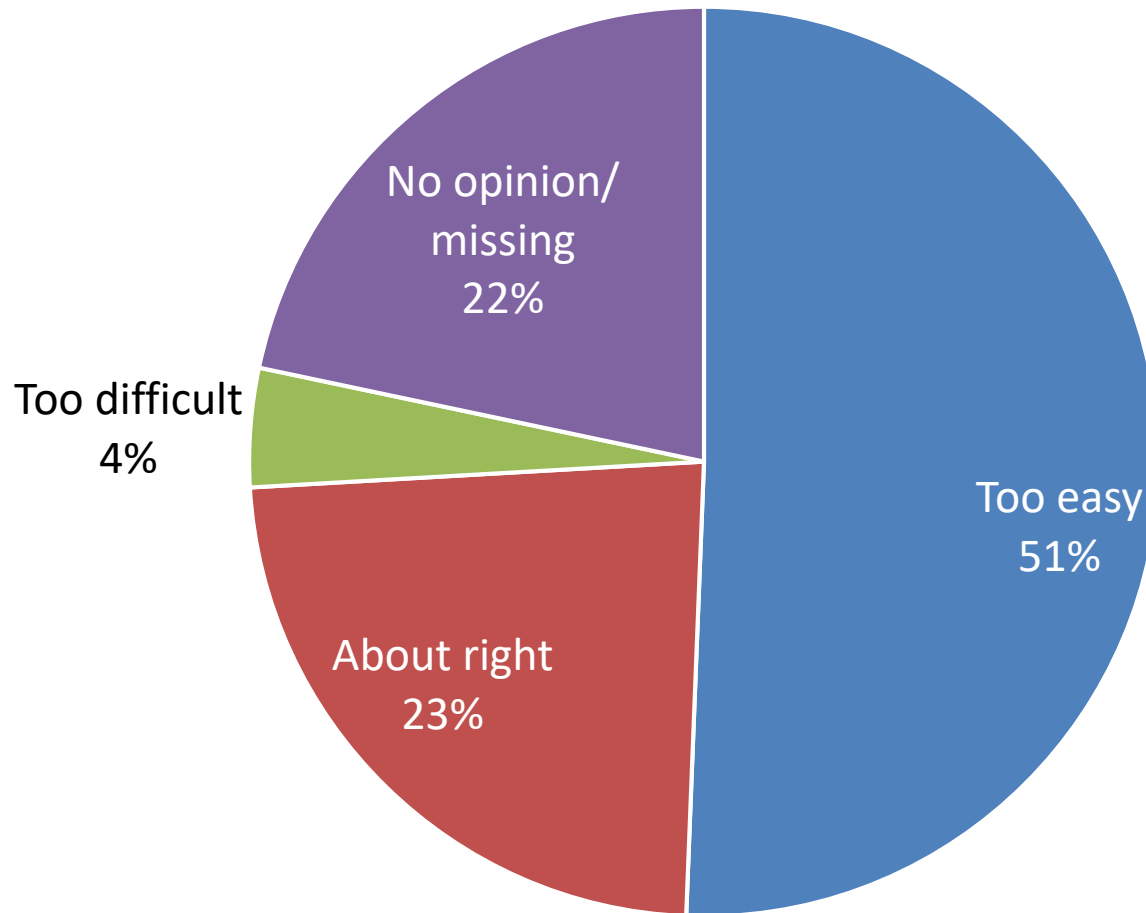
# Do you think it is too easy to buy a gun in the U.S. today, too difficult to buy a gun in the U.S. today, or about right?

**i** Poll is full and no longer accepting responses



# PA opinions: LionPoll 2017

Do you think it is too easy to buy a gun in the U.S. today, too difficult to buy a gun in the U.S. today, or about right?



# Summary

- We know where people stand
- Some surveys tells us why
- Little information on how people understand others' positions on gun control
  - Important so we can move toward legislative compromise



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# Research questions

RQ1: How do Pennsylvanians articulate reasons for opposing positions on sale of firearms laws?

RQ2: What factors predict Pennsylvanians' ability to articulate reasons for opposing positions?



# METHODS



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# Telephone survey: Penn State Poll

- Conducted by PSH **Center for Survey Research**
- Part of biannual **omnibus Penn State Poll**
- Administered March 12-May 19, 2016
- Random sample of 600+ adult PA residents





# Survey questions

- In general, do you feel that laws covering the sale of firearms should be made:
  - more strict;
  - less strict;
  - or kept as they are now?
- What is your main reason or reasons for your position on the sale of firearms?
- What might be the main reason or reasons you think other citizens have a different position on the sale of firearms?



# Coding scheme

- Open-ended questions:
  - 1. Reasons for own position**
  - 2. Reasons for others' position**
- 2 independent coders
  - Kappa = 0.663-0.698,  $p < 0.000$
  - Third coder resolved all inconsistencies



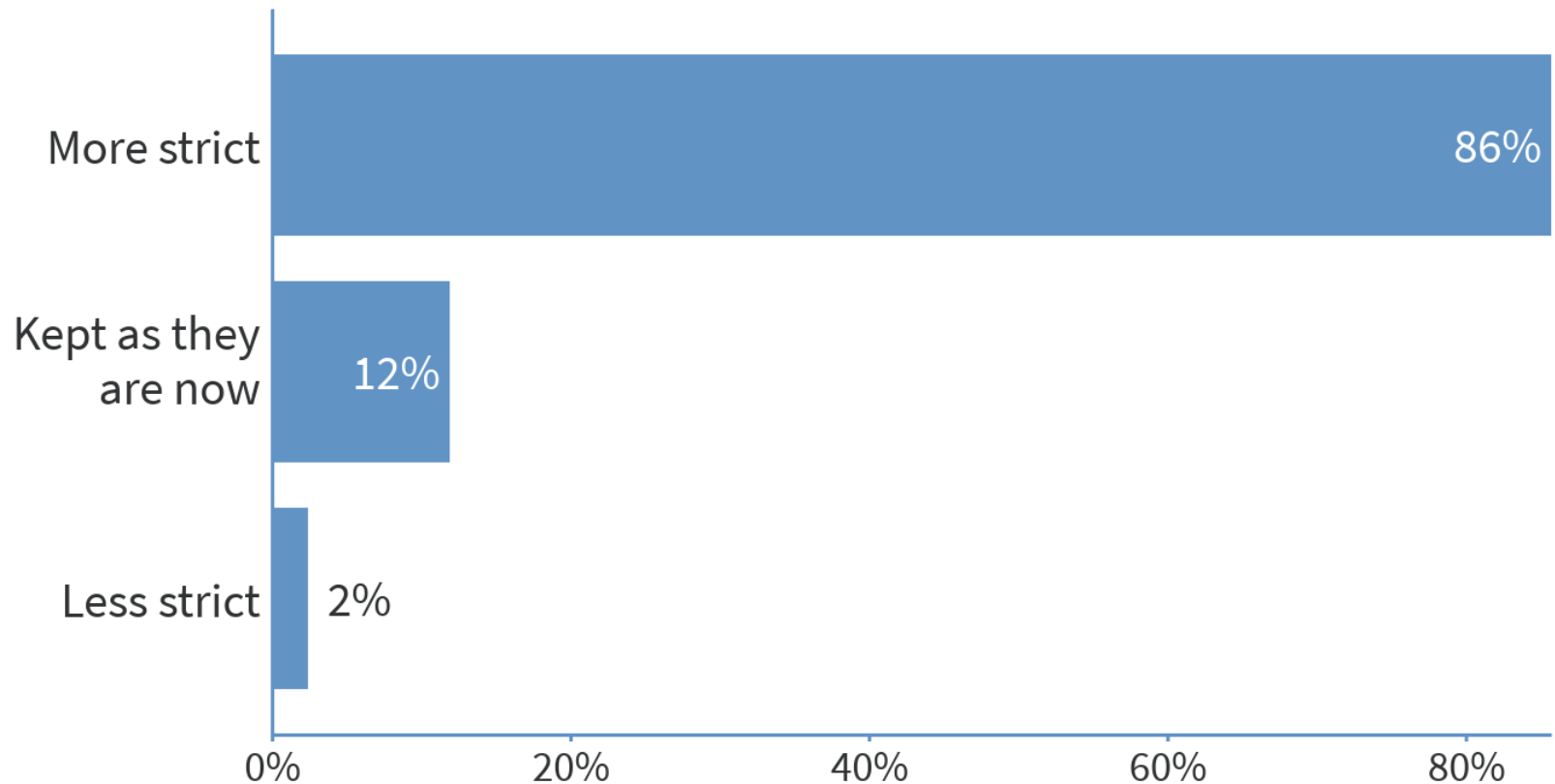
# RESULTS



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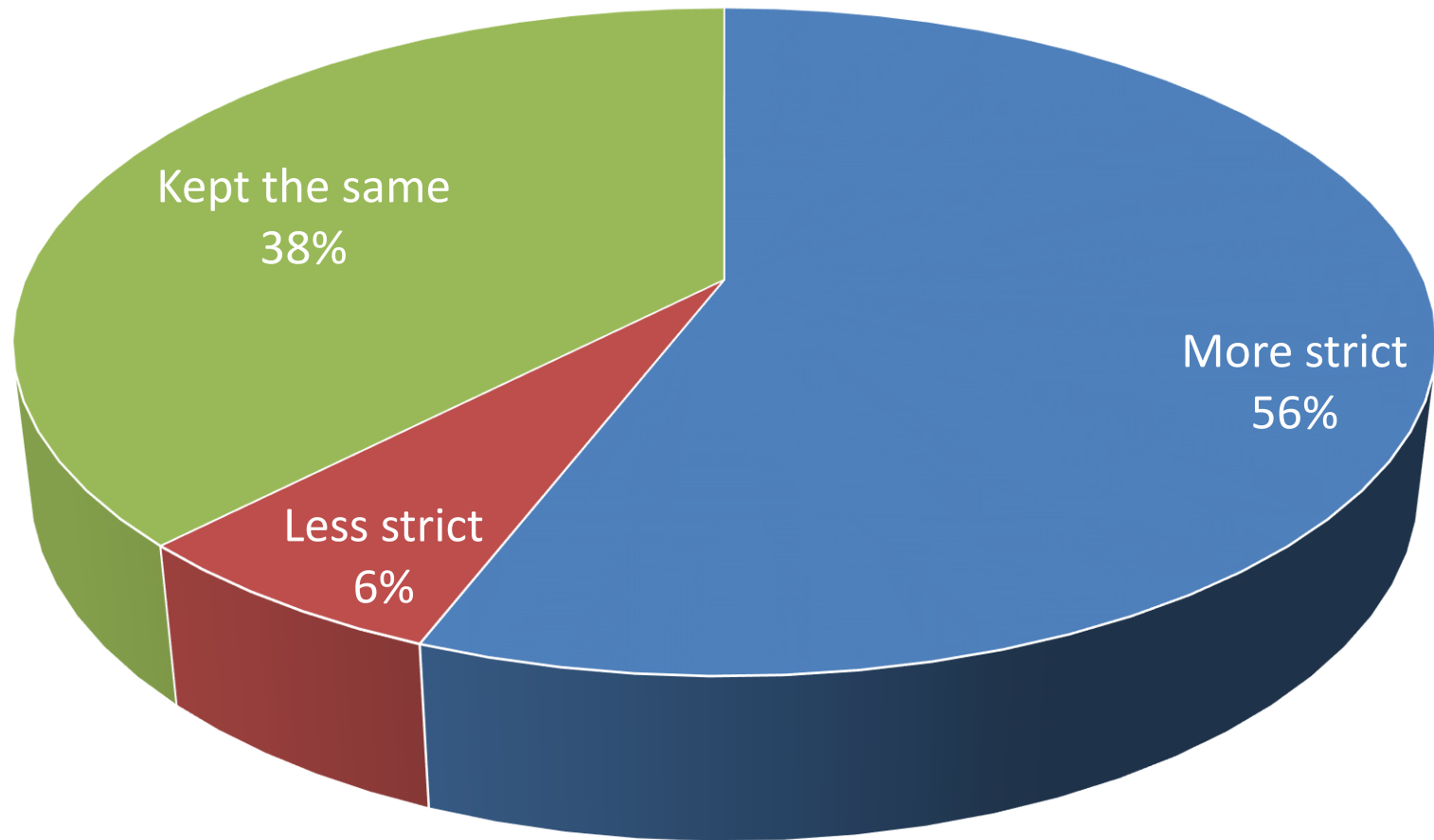
## In general, do you feel that laws covering the sale of firearms should be made:

**i** Poll is full and no longer accepting responses



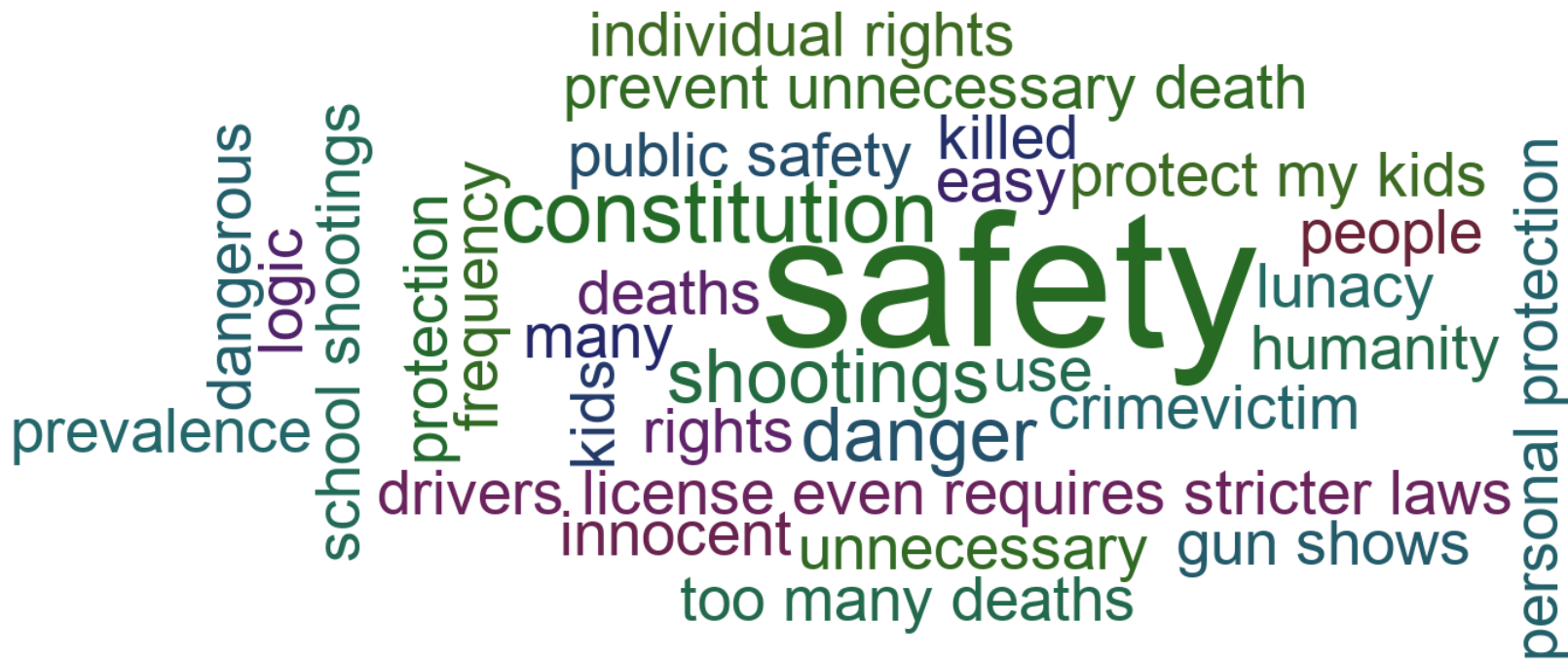
# Laws covering the sale of firearms should be...

(n= 589)



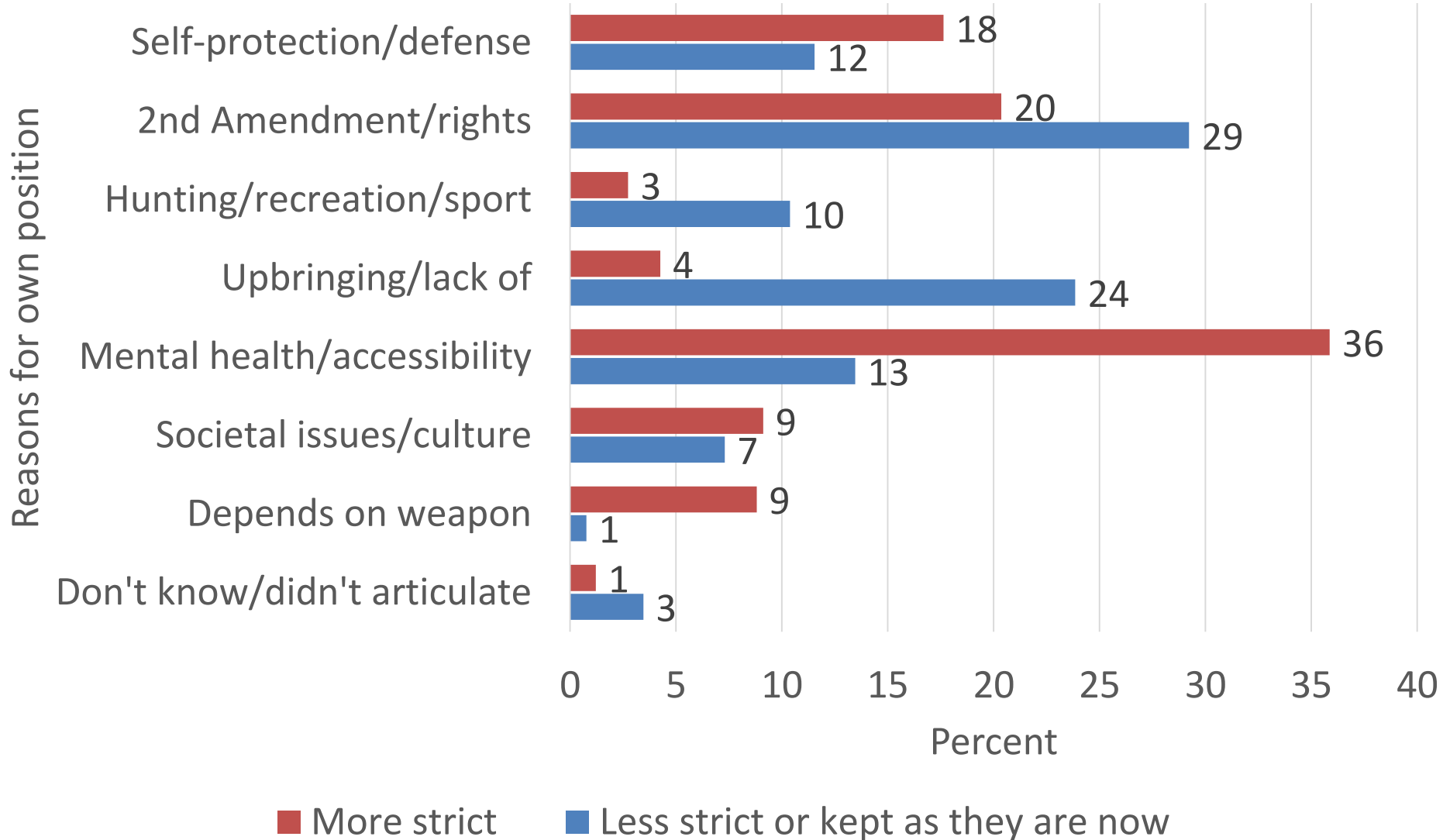
**What is your main reason for your position on the sale of firearms? (If using more than one word, use \_ to connect the phrase.)**

**i** Poll is full and no longer accepting responses



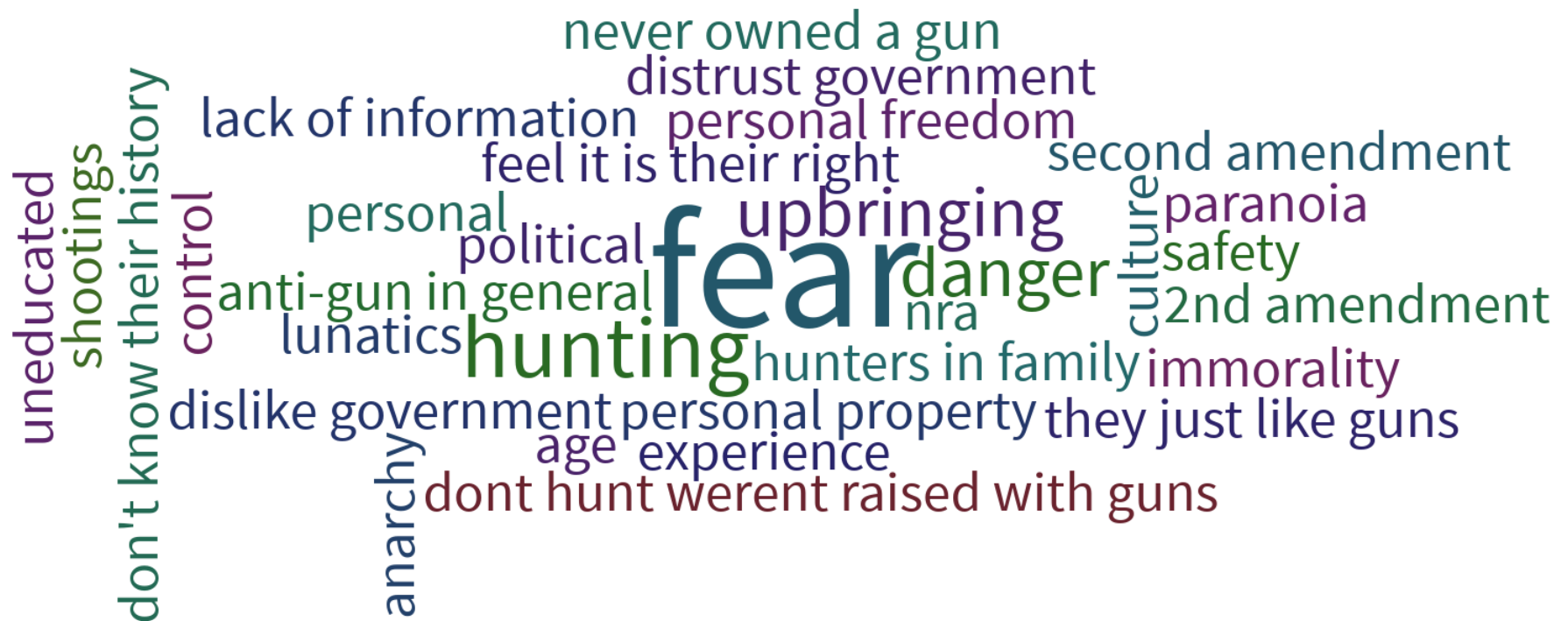
# Reason for position

(n= 589)



What might be the main reason you think other citizens have a different position on the sale of firearms? (If using more than one word, use \_ to connect the phrase.)

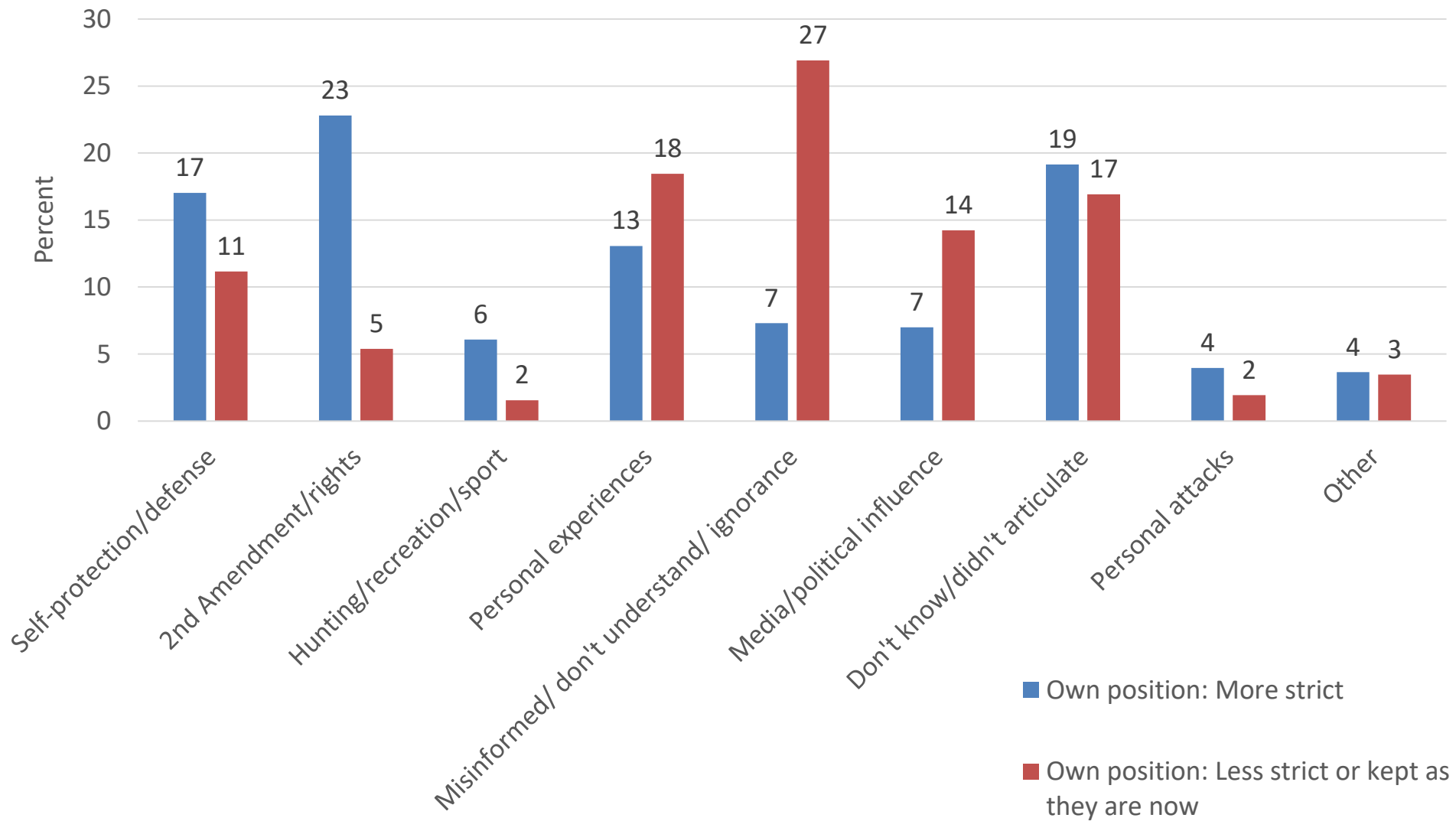
 Poll is full and no longer accepting responses





# Others' reasons for opposite position

(n= 589)



# RQ1: How do Pennsylvanians articulate reasons for opposing positions on sale of firearms laws?

**Those who think firearms sales should be more strict think others want laws kept the same or loosened:**

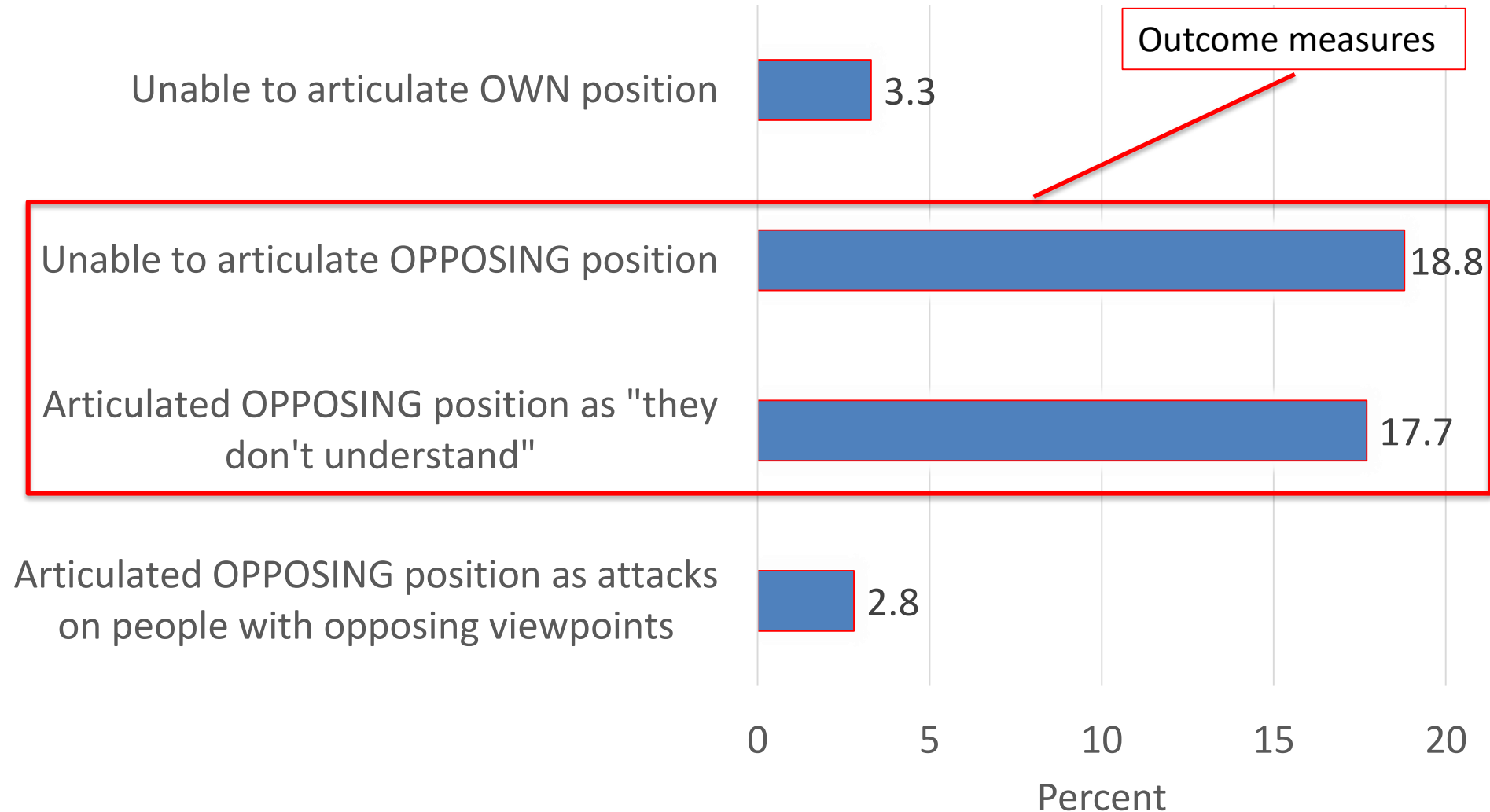
- because of 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment rights
- for self-protection/ defense
- based on their personal experiences






**Those who think firearms laws should be less strict/ kept the same think others want laws more strict because:**

- they are misinformed
- of their personal experiences
- of the media



# Notably, many are unable to articulate reasons for other positions



	Able to articulate others' position	Others are "Misinformed"
Support stricter laws on firearms sales	(Not a significant predictor)	
White		(Not a significant predictor)
Men	(Not a significant predictor)	(Not a significant predictor)
Age	**75+ years <i>less</i> able to articulate than 18-24 years	(Not a significant predictor)
Democrat	(Not a significant predictor)	
Republican	(Not a significant predictor)	(Not a significant predictor)
Some college/ Associate's degree	(Not a significant predictor)	(Not a significant predictor)
Bachelor's degree		(Not a significant predictor)
Graduate education		(Not a significant predictor)

Notes: Independent was the reference category for political affiliation; High school/GED was the reference category for education.

# Summary

**Better able to articulate opposing positions:**

- Whites
- Those age 18-24 years (compared to 75+ years)
- Those with more education

**Opposing positions are “misinformed” is less likely said by:**

- Those who want stricter gun laws
- Democrats



# IMPLICATIONS



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# Suggestions for policymakers

- Nearly 40% of Pennsylvanians are unable to articulate opposing positions on sale of firearms laws
- Inform constituents of all arguments
- Demonstrate consideration of all arguments
  - Constituent support may improve



# Suggestions for future research

- Replicate post-Parkland in current political climate
  - With more expansive list of questions
- Does understanding others' positions improve with other controversial topics?

