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Poll: N.J. concerns about gun violence have eased

February 07, 2013 | By Jonathan Lai, INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

New Jerseyans' concern about gun violence has fallen slightly as the two-month anniversary of the shooting in Newtown, Conn., approaches next week, according to the latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll.

The number of respondents who were "very concerned" about the amount of gun violence in the United States fell to 69 percent, from 77 percent in a similar December poll.

Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics surveyed adults in New Jersey by phone from Jan. 30 to Feb. 3. The results of the new poll, which had 796 respondents, have a margin of error of 3.5 percentage points.

Story continues below.

The downward shift returns to a concern level just slightly above that seen in a poll the institute conducted last August, before the Sandy Hook shooting but after high-profile shootings in Colorado and Wisconsin. A shooting at the Empire State Building occurred during that polling period.

After the Sandy Hook shooting, the polls show, concern over gun violence spiked in New Jersey, across ideologies and demographic breakdowns. That trend has begun to return, with some backlash, poll director David Redlawsk, a Rutgers political science professor, said in a statement.

"In the immediate shock of the Sandy Hook shootings, partisanship and self-interest gave way briefly," Redlawsk said. "But we are beginning to see the usual partisan differences again, with Republicans supporting gun owners, and owners reasserting their rights."

The new results show 78 percent of Democrats, 66 percent of independents, and 55 percent of Republicans answering that they were "very concerned" about gun violence.

A strong partisan split had 84 percent of Democrats and 66 percent of independents answering that controlling gun ownership is more important than protecting the right of Americans to own guns.

And respondents were split evenly on the effects of stricter gun laws on violence: 61 percent of Democrats polled said they believe stricter gun laws will reduce the amount of violence, while 35 percent said violence levels would remain the same. Republicans polled the exact opposite.

When asked about the causes of gun violence, respondents blamed easy access to guns, at 34 percent, more than twice as much as inadequate background checks, which was blamed about as much as parents and treatment of the mentally ill.

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A task force established by Gov. Christie is holding public hearings this week as it prepares recommendations to advise the governor on how to address "violence control." On Tuesday in Camden, speakers focused on economic and social issues, rather than direct gun control.

President Obama convened a similar task force after the Newtown shooting, which provided recommendations he approved in an executive order.

Asked about specific parts of the President's plans, New Jerseyans voiced strong support for improved mental-health services (90 percent) and a tougher background check system (90 percent).

Story continues below.



Three-quarters of New Jerseyans polled supported renewing a federal ban on military-style assault weapons and limiting high-capacity ammunition magazines. Seventy percent favored hiring school resource officers and counselors.

Universal background checks, the measure most strongly supported by poll respondents, had 93 percent overall support, with little difference in partisan affiliation or gun ownership.

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