

Media Contacts:
Dr. Susan A. MacManus
Distinguished University Professor and Project Director
Direct phone: (813) 503-0561 | macmanus@usf.edu

Angela Crist
Director, Florida Institute of Government
Direct phone: (813) 857-8801 | acrist@usf.edu

Tampa, Fla. (October 10, 2017)

Floridians grade State's gun laws, safety of children at school, adults in public places, and help for mentally disabled

By Susan A. MacManus, *Project director*

The 2017 USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey, which was conducted before the recent Las Vegas massacre but more than a year after the Pulse Nightclub shooting¹, found that **Floridians are about evenly divided on the restrictiveness of State gun control laws.**

At the same time, Floridians give the State relatively high marks for securing the safety of children at school (54% "good" or "excellent") and adults in public places (51% "good" or "excellent"). But they are **critical of the State for its assistance to the mentally disabled** (64% rate it "poor" or "fair").

To professionals, the term "mentally disabled" is somewhat different from "mental illness." In the minds of non-specialists, however, the two terms are interchangeable.² Moreover, while the medical community continues to debate whether mental illness is directly linked to violence³, the two are often linked in the public's mind.⁴ **In this survey, 43% of those who want more restrictive gun laws judge the State's assistance to its mentally disabled citizens as "poor."**⁵

¹ June 12, 2016.

² See Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, "What is Psychiatric Disability and Mental Illness," Boston University College of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences, accessed October 5, 2017.

³ Jonathan M. Metzler and Kenneth T. MacLeish, "Mental Illness, Mass Shooting, and the Politics of American Firearms," *American Journal of Public Health*, February 2015; Some within the medical community view the mentally ill as more the victims of crime than the ones victimizing. See Dr. Michelle Heyland, "After Mass Shootings, Mental Illness is Always the Scapegoat," *The Hill*, October 3, 2017; <http://thehill.com/opinion/healthcare/353674-after-mass-shootings-mental-illness-is-always-the-scapegoat>

⁴ See "Mental Illness and Violence," *Harvard Mental Health Letter*, Harvard Medical School, January, 2011. Kim Parker et al, "Views on Gun Policy," Pew Research Center, June 22, 2017.

⁵ Statistically significant at the .001 level.

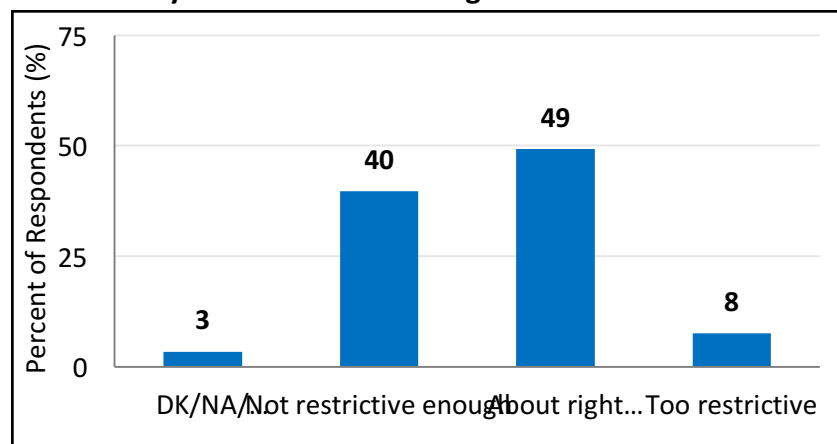
Current gun laws: A state divided

Floridians are split on current State gun laws, with 49% saying restrictiveness is “about right” and 40% “not restrictive enough”—far outweighing the share who label them “too restrictive” (8%). The “about right” share has risen from 42% in 2015 (the last time the question was asked).

Views vary significantly by gender, age, race/ethnicity, employment status, and region. **Men** are more content than women (54% vs. 44%), **whites and Hispanics** more than African Americans (53% vs. 31%), and **full-time employees** more than others. Regionally, support is highest in the **Orlando (57%) and North Florida (56%) areas**. While it might seem counter-intuitive that the Orlando region supports the status quo considering the Pulse Nightclub shootings, it is important to note that the region contains a number of more conservative counties.⁶

On the “not restrictive enough” side are **women (47%), seniors (48% of those ages 80 and older), African Americans (57%),** and those **out of the work force (50%)**. Research shows women are more attentive than men to gun violence especially via the media,⁷ seniors are more vulnerable to crime than younger persons, and African Americans are more likely to worry about gun violence in their own neighborhoods,⁸ as are the less-educated and out of work. The two regions with the highest share of “not restrictive enough” opinions are **Palm Beach (56%) and Miami/Fort Lauderdale (52%)**.

About half of Floridians say the State’s gun laws are “about right”; More say “not restrictive enough” than “too restrictive”



Question wording: “In thinking about Florida’s current gun laws, do you think they are not restrictive enough, too restrictive, or about right as is?”

Source: Telephone survey of a random sample of 1,215 Floridians ages 18 and older conducted July 24-August 14, 2017. Margin of error \pm 2.8%.

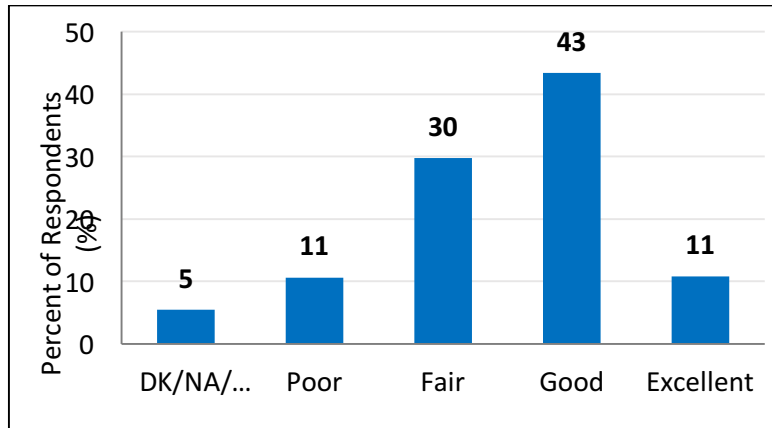
2017 USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey

⁶ Brevard, Flagler, Lake, Marion, Sumter, Volusia counties.

⁷ Juliana Menasce Horowitz et al, “4. Views of Guns and Gun Violence,” America’s Complex Relationship With Guns, Pew Research Center, June 22, 2017.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Slight majority of Floridians give State positive marks for securing safety of children at school



Question wording: "How good a job does the state do securing the safety of children at school? Would you say excellent, good, fair or poor?"

Source: Telephone survey of a random sample of 1,215 Floridians ages 18 and older conducted July 24-August 14, 2017. Margin of error \pm 2.8%.

2017 USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey

State gets positive ratings for securing safety of children at school.

A slight majority (54%) says the State does a "good" or "excellent" job securing the safety of children at school. Men are more likely than women to give good marks to the State (56% vs. 52%). Positive ratings also come from 55- to 64-year-olds (57%), those not in the workforce (64%), residents living in middle-income households (56%), and the college educated (55%).

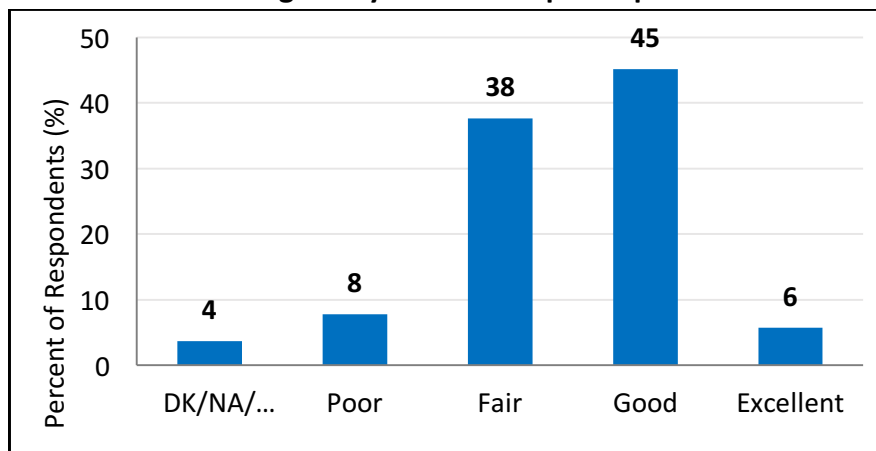
Regionally, residents of North Florida (68%) and Tampa Bay (59%) rate the State's school safety efforts most favorably, while residents of three regions judge the efforts to be "fair" or "poor" — Palm Beach (49%), Miami/Fort Lauderdale (45%), and Orlando (44%). The latter have more schools in densely populated, inner-city neighborhoods.

The ratings are in flux, however. Since 2016, the share of Floridians saying "good" or "excellent" has fallen 5 percentage points (from 59% to 54%). Over the same period, the "fair" or "poor" shares have both modestly increased.

About half of Floridians give the State a good grade for securing adults' safety in public places. But a sizable share is less positive.

Floridians are slightly more negative about the State's success at securing adult safety in public places than at protecting school children. **While 51% rate adult protection as "good" or "excellent," 46% grade it "fair" or "poor."** These assessments have changed little since the question was first posed in 2014. The most critical are Millennials (50%), African Americans (67%), and unemployed persons (57%)—those most likely to live, work, or play in high-density areas.⁹ Regionally, more worry about adult safety in public places in Naples (51%) and Miami/Fort Lauderdale (50%) than in North Florida with its lower population density.¹⁰

State gets good but mixed marks from Floridians for securing safety of adults in public places



Question wording: "How good a job does the state do securing the safety of adults in public places? Would you say excellent, good, fair or poor?"

Source: Telephone survey of a random sample of 1,215 Floridians ages 18 and older conducted July 24-August 14, 2017. Margin of error \pm 2.8%.

2017 USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey

State's assistance to the mentally disabled gets a thumbs-down.

Surveyed before the Las Vegas massacre, Floridians by a two-thirds majority believe the State has not been attentive enough to the needs of its citizens who are mentally disabled. They judge the State's efforts as "poor" (34%) or "fair" (31%). (It's likely that "mentally disabled" is interpreted as an umbrella term to include "mental illness.")

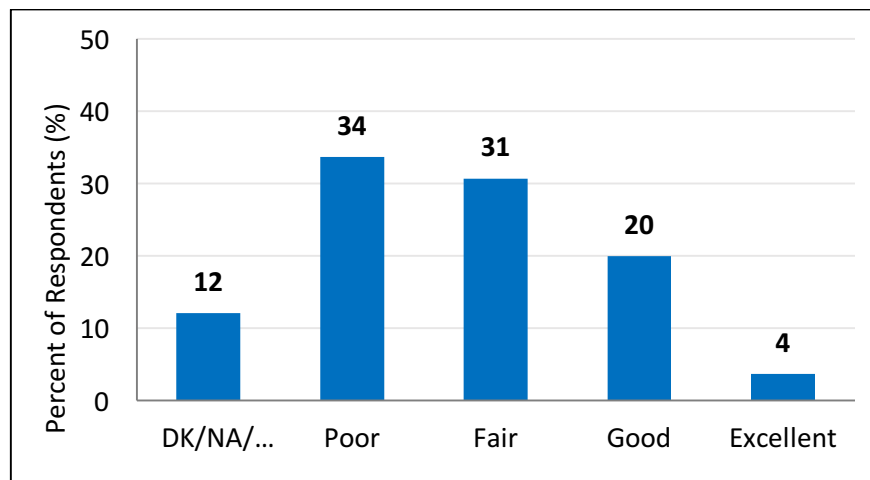
⁹ "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime," Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Summer 2016. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/summer16/highlight2.html>; accessed September 28, 2017.

¹⁰ Stefan Rayer & Ying Wang, "Measuring Population Density for Counties in Florida," Bureau of Economic and Business Research, University of Florida, October 30, 2014; <https://bebr.ufl.edu/population/website-article/measuring-population-density-counties-florida>; accessed September 28, 2017.

Persons ages 55 to 64 (39%) and 65 to 79 (37%)—the soon-to-be or recently retired—are the sharpest critics (“poor” ratings) of the State’s assistance. So, too, are **college graduates (39%)**—those most likely to have a greater awareness of mental health issues.

The most positive assessments come from younger Floridians, those with a child younger than 18 living in their home, part-time workers, and those with a high school education or less. This younger demographic is often less aware of mental health issues than older generations, although the rate of mental health problems among the young is on the rise.¹¹

More than six in ten Floridians rate the State’s performance assisting the mentally disabled as “poor” or “fair”



Question wording: “How good a job does the state do assisting the mentally disabled? Would you say excellent, good, fair or poor?”

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Telephone survey of a random sample of 1,215 Floridians ages 18 and older conducted July 24-August 14, 2017. Margin of error \pm 2.8%.

2017 USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey

Impact of Las Vegas massacre unclear. Will State assistance to its mentally disabled improve?

It’s unclear whether the Las Vegas massacre may sway the opinions of Floridians on the restrictiveness of State gun control laws. What is clear, however, is that most think the State is not doing enough to assist citizens who are mentally impaired.

¹¹ “According to survey data released by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, nearly 20% of the adult population reportedly suffers from some mental illness. The prevalence of adult Americans suffering from severe mental illness is estimated at 4.6%, or 10.4 million people. Mental illness is the leading cause of disability in the U.S. It’s reported that approximately 20% of young people will suffer from a mental disorder that inhibits daily functioning at some point in their lives.” Source: Antioch University, “Mental Health Issues in America on the Rise,” March 3, 2017. <https://www.antioch.edu/auonline/2017/03/03/mental-health-issues-america-rise-2/>, accessed October 5, 2017.

Interested parties may view results for all questions and detailed analysis, including questions not analyzed here and significant factors for all related questions, on the survey website:

<http://www.sunshinestatesurvey.org/results/2017/>

The USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey is a collaborative learning opportunity between the USF College of Arts and Sciences and The Nielsen Company, LLC., that allows USF students to gain valuable experience before graduation. Each of the students below made significant contributions to this year’s Survey. Valuable input into the survey question content and structure came from all students in the upper-level Media and Politics class (Spring 2017).

Student analytic team

Ella Biggins

Neil Dalson

Nathaniel Sweet

Aida Vazquez-Soto

Student infographics team

Amy Benner

Georgia Pevy

—END—