

Survey reveals a third of NZ gun owners distrust gun lobby

August 14 2019, by Kate C. Prickett And Simon Chapple



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The terrorist attacks on the Christchurch Muslim community on 15 March this year resulted in a political response that was decidedly different from what usually follows mass shootings in the United States.

The speed of legislative action, banning military-style semi-automatic

weapons (MSSAs) within days of the attack, was remarked on both at home and [around the world](#). Some [gun owners](#) began handing over their MSSAs [to police voluntarily](#) after the attacks, and [hundreds of guns have been handed in](#) during government buyback events throughout the country.

But there was another group who considered the [government response an over-reaction](#) and an infringement of gun owners' rights.

Given these diverging views, which story truly reflects gun owners? Do gun owners [trust](#) the government to do what's right? And do they trust other gun owners or the pro-gun lobby that purports to represent them?

These are questions we can now answer from our [recent survey](#).

Gun owners are middle-class European Kiwis

Our team runs an annual survey asking a nationally representative sample of New Zealanders about their trust in people and institutions. The [2019 survey](#) was carried out just prior to the attacks, but we decided to run it again in April, primarily to see whether this tragedy had an impact on trust. We also asked respondents whether they were a gun owner or living in a household with someone who owned a gun—and we asked about trust in gun owners and the pro-gun lobby.

Overall, 15% of respondents reported owning a gun (7.7%) or living in a household with someone who owned a gun (7.5%). Among those who said they owned a gun, 88% were men, but among those who said they didn't personally own a gun but there was one in the home, 81% were women. In short, men own guns.

People in gun-owning households were somewhat more likely to be New Zealand European (84% vs 74% in the general population) and were

more likely to be between 45 and 60 years old, compared to those who did not own guns (34% vs 25%).

Household gun owners reported moderately lower levels of education, with 32% having a university degree compared with 37% of non-gun owners. They were more likely to report middle-class household incomes between NZ\$50,000 and NZ\$150,000 (60% vs 52%) and less likely to live in big cities (21% vs 47%).

These statistics paint the profile of gun-owning households as fairly average, middle-class, New Zealand European Kiwis, with men primarily the owners.

Gun owners trust themselves

Perhaps surprisingly, gun owners are only a little different from others in thinking the government is generally doing the right thing. Controlling for the things that differentiate gun owners from those who don't own guns, we found a statistically significant, but not very meaningful difference. Survey respondents were asked:

"How much trust do you have in the government to do what is right for New Zealand?"

On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is "very little/none" and 4 is "a great deal," gun owners reported an average of 2.6 vs 2.7 among those who did not own guns.

If gun owners seem like the group who stood to lose through this legislation, why aren't there bigger differences between those who do and do not own guns in their trust in government? One explanation could be that gun owners are actually more similar than different from the rest of New Zealand when it comes to their views on guns.

In addition to asking about trust in groups such as police, medical practitioners and corporations, we asked people how much trust they had in gun owners and the pro-gun lobby to do the right thing. This scale ranged from 1 (no trust at all) to 5 (complete trust). Unsurprisingly, gun owners reported a higher average trust level in other gun owners: 3.4 compared with 2.7 among those who did not own guns—a moderate to large effect size.

When looking at trust in the pro-gun lobby, gun owners still reported higher levels of trust than non-gun owners—2.7 vs 2.2. But the overall levels of trust were much lower than in gun owners generally. Gun owners tended to rate the gun lobby similar in trust as corporations and politicians. Those who don't own guns rated the gun lobby as only more trustworthy than bloggers or online commentators.

Gun owners' distrust in pro-gun lobby

It suggests that gun owners have trust in themselves to do the [right thing](#), but far less trust in the pro-gun lobby to represent their best interests. But is it just that gun owners are apathetic to the gun lobby—they neither trust nor distrust it—or is it actual distrust in the lobbyists?

The data suggests it may be a bit of both. Over a third of gun owners distrust the gun lobby compared with only 9% of gun owners who don't trust other gun owners. On the flipside, close to half of gun owners either have lots or complete trust in gun owners but only 23% can say the same about the gun lobby.

When this survey was conducted, the main legislative change announced was a [ban and government buy-back of MSSAs](#). For the average gun owner, this might have been seen as sensible. But as [more changes were announced](#) and the gun lobby began to mobilise, it is important to understand whether their views are widely shared by gun owners.

Although gun owners report higher trust in gun owners and the pro-gun lobby, breaking this down by political ideology shows that most of the higher levels of lobbyist trust are concentrated among those gun owners to the political right. For example, among those on the political left, there is no statistical difference in trust in gun owners and the pro-gun lobby by whether you own a gun or not. The difference in gun trust among gun owners and those who don't own guns is widest on the centre, centre right and right.

As New Zealand goes through the process of reforming gun laws to make our country safer and reinforce [gun ownership as a privilege rather than a right](#), one thing is important: the views of the average gun owner are not co-opted by a fringe view of gun ownership.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Survey reveals a third of NZ gun owners distrust gun lobby (2019, August 14) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-08-survey-reveals-nz-gun-owners.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--