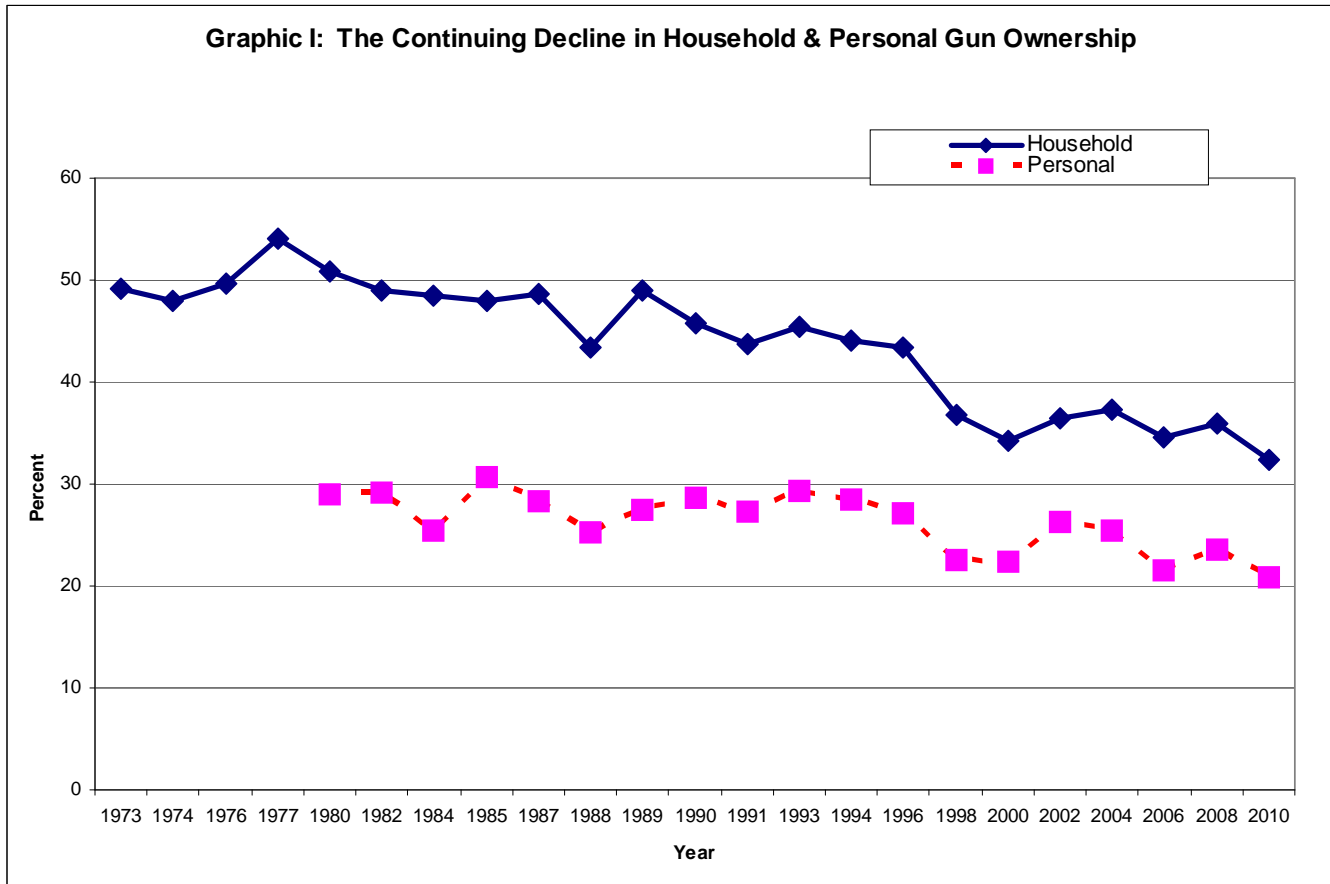




A Shrinking Minority

The Continuing Decline of Gun Ownership in America



Gun ownership in America is declining. This is the unavoidable conclusion from new, comprehensive, national data spanning nearly 40 years contained in the General Social Survey (GSS) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. The GSS started in 1972 and completed its 28th round in 2010. According to NORC, “Except for the U.S. Census, the GSS is the most frequently analyzed source of information in the social sciences.”¹

¹ General Social Survey (GSS) gun ownership data contained in this study was obtained in March 2011 from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) by the Violence Policy Center. According to NORC, “The General Social Survey (GSS) is one of NORC’s flagship surveys and our longest running project...For the last third of a century the GSS has been monitoring social change and the growing complexity of American society. The GSS is the largest project funded by the Sociology Program of the National Science Foundation. Except for the U.S. Census, the GSS is the most frequently analyzed source of information in the social sciences...It is the only survey that has tracked the opinions of Americans over an extended period of time. The GSS is also a major teaching tool. We know of over 14,000

Household Gun Ownership

Since the early 1970s the General Social Survey has asked the question: “Do you happen to have in your home (if house: or garage) any guns or revolvers?” According to the GSS data available² for the years 1973 to 2010 detailed in the chart below:

- From 1977 to 2010, the percentage of American households that reported having any guns in the home dropped more than 40 percent.
- During this period household gun ownership hit its peak in 1977, when more than half (54 percent) of American households reported having any guns. By 2010, this number had dropped more than 20 percentage points to a low during this period of 32.3 percent of American households reporting having any guns in the home.
- In 2010, less than a third of American households reported having a gun in the home.

Graphic II: Household Gun Ownership in the United States, 1973 to 2010					
Year	Percent Households	Year	Percent Households	Year	Percent Households
1973	49.1	1987	48.6	1998	36.7
1974	47.9	1988	43.4	2000	34.3
1976	49.7	1989	48.9	2002	36.4
1977	54.0	1990	45.8	2004	37.3
1980	50.8	1991	43.7	2006	34.5
1982	48.9	1993	45.5	2008	36.0
1984	48.5	1994	44.0	2010	32.3
1985	48.0	1996	43.4		

research uses such as articles in academic journals, books, and Ph.D. dissertations based on the GSS and about 250,000 students annually who use it in their classes.” See <http://www.norc.org/gss+website/about+gss/about+gss.htm>, downloaded April 14, 2011.

² Data contained in chart represent years for which the question was asked during the period cited.

Personal Gun Ownership

Since 1980, General Social Survey respondents who state that they have a gun in their home are then asked, “Do any of these guns personally belong to you?” The GSS data available for the years 1980 to 2010³ detailed in the chart below presents information on overall personal gun ownership, male personal gun ownership, and female personal gun ownership.

Graphic III: Personal Gun Ownership in the United States, 1980 to 2010							
<i>Year</i>	<i>Percent Overall Personal Ownership</i>	<i>Percent Male Personal Ownership</i>	<i>Percent Female Personal Ownership</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Percent Overall Personal Ownership</i>	<i>Percent Male Personal Ownership</i>	<i>Percent Female Personal Ownership</i>
1980	29.0	51.7	10.5	1994	28.4	46.3	12.6
1982	29.1	47.2	14.3	1996	27.2	44.1	12.5
1984	25.5	45.2	10.8	1998	22.6	37.7	10.7
1985	30.7	51.9	11.9	2000	22.3	37.7	9.3
1987	28.3	47.4	12.6	2002	26.3	37.5	11.8
1988	25.2	44.2	11.1	2004	25.5	41.3	11.6
1989	27.4	49.4	9.3	2006	21.6	34.9	10.6
1990	28.7	52.4	9.5	2008	23.6	38.4	10.9
1991	27.3	47.7	10.1	2010	20.8	33.2	9.9
1993	29.4	48.5	13.6				

Overall Personal Gun Ownership

- From 1985 to 2010, the percentage of Americans who reported personally owning a gun dropped more than 32 percent.
- During this period, personal gun ownership hit its peak in 1985, when 30.7 percent of Americans reported personally owning a gun. By 2010, this number had dropped nearly 10 percentage points to a low during this period of 20.8 percent.
- In 2010, slightly more than one out of five Americans reported personally owning a gun.

³ Data contained in chart represent years for which the question was asked during the period cited.

Male Personal Gun Ownership

- From 1990 to 2010, the percentage of males who reported personally owning a gun dropped nearly 37 percent.
- During this period, male gun ownership hit its peak in 1990, when 52.4 percent of males reported personally owning a gun. By 2010, this number had dropped more than 19 percentage points to a low during this period of 33.2 percent.
- In 2010, only one out of three American males reported personally owning a gun.

Female Personal Gun Ownership

- Female personal gun ownership remained relatively rare, fluctuating within a narrow range with no recent signs of increase. Female personal gun ownership peaked at 14.3 percent in 1982. In 2010, the female personal gun ownership rate was 9.9 percent.
- In 2010, only one out of 10 American females reported personally owning a gun.

Reasons for the Decline

Key factors contributing to the continuing decline in household and personal gun ownership in America include the following.

- The aging of the current-gun owning population—primarily white males—and a lack of interest in guns by youth.
- The end of military conscription.
- The decreasing popularity of hunting.
- Land-use issues that limit hunting and other shooting activities.
- Environmental and zoning issues that force shooting ranges to close and limit new range construction.
- The increase in single-parent homes headed by women.