

Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation and Responsive Management Complete New Study Examining Recent Declines in Americans' Approval of Hunting and Sport Shooting

Americans' approval of legal hunting declined from 80.8% in 2021 to 75.7% in 2024 (a loss of 12.9 million U.S. adults approving of the activity). Approval of legal recreational shooting went from 81.0% to 76.4% over the same period (a decline of 11.7 million U.S. adults approving of sport shooting).

With these recent trends in mind, the Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation and Responsive Management obtained funding through a Multistate Conservation Grant to conduct research to determine the reasons for these statistically significant declines in approval. The project results will build cultural support for hunting and sport shooting by applying the research insights to programs and outreach initiatives.

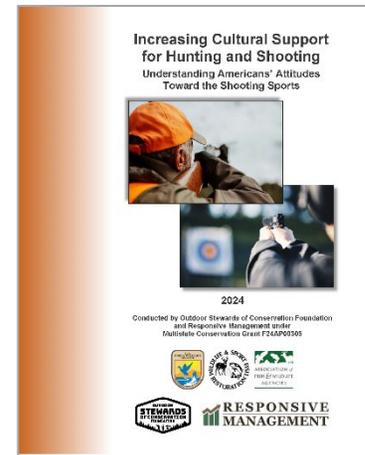
The project included three major phases. The first phase entailed a review and analysis of existing research related to Americans' approval of hunting and sport shooting, with new crosstabulations conducted using data from recent national and state surveys. The next phase entailed qualitative data collection through four focus groups: the groups were held with adult U.S. residents with mixed to negative attitudes toward hunting and/or sport shooting. Each major region of the country was represented, and the groups included a mix of ages and genders.

With the qualitative data in hand, the partners embarked on the third phase of the project, a scientific multimodal survey of adult U.S. residents (n=2,065). The survey included an oversample of residents with negative attitudes about hunting and/or sport shooting, and the report includes two major data runs of the results: general population U.S. residents as a whole (n=1,555) and those who have become more negative about hunting and/or sport shooting in recent years (n=479 more negative about hunting; n=531 more negative about sport shooting). Survey data were collected by phone (landline/cell) and online (including text messages), and the report includes both national and regional results.

One of the central findings of the study is that while most Americans continue to approve of hunting and sport shooting, attitudes are not fixed: notable percentages of people say they are becoming either more positive or more negative in their views of the two activities.

Currently, 16% of Americans are negative or are becoming more negative in their opinion of hunting: this includes both people who currently approve of hunting but are becoming more negative (3%) and people who currently disapprove and are becoming even more negative or are just staying the same in their disapproval (13%). Americans who disapprove of hunting are more likely to be female, Black, or Hispanic.

Meanwhile, 19% of Americans are negative or becoming more negative in their opinion of sport shooting. This segment includes 4% who currently approve of sport shooting but are becoming more negative and 15% who currently disapprove and are getting more negative or staying the same in their disapproval. Residents who disapprove of sport shooting are more likely to be female, Black, or Hispanic, and more likely to live in an urban or suburban area.



Another major finding from the project relates to Americans' concern about gun violence and the effect this has on their attitudes toward hunting and sport shooting. As a general issue of concern, gun violence ranks ahead of food insecurity, immigration, wildlife populations, and climate change.

Meanwhile, a third of Americans say that concern about gun violence affects their opinion of hunting, while almost half say it affects their opinion of sport shooting. These percentages are much higher among the segment of the public that has become more negative about the two activities in recent years.

Other key findings from the research include the following:

- ✓ The most common reason for becoming more negative about sport shooting in the past few years is the perception that firearms are linked to violence—by far the top reason.
- ✓ Meanwhile, the most common reasons for becoming more negative about hunting relate to animal welfare concerns: specifically, the feeling that animals should not be killed and that hunting should not be done for recreation or for sport.
- ✓ The most reliable ways to build support for hunting include emphasizing hunting as a key component of wildlife management; emphasizing hunters' role in funding wildlife conservation; and communicating that hunting in the United States is regulated specifically to ensure that wildlife populations remain stable and healthy.
- ✓ To build support for sport shooting, messages and communications should emphasize safety: in the survey, the top-rated messages in favor of sport shooting—even among people who are negative about it—highlight safety. This includes both people being safe when using firearms and firearms making people feel safer. Additionally, as with hunting, messages should communicate that sport shooters help fund wildlife conservation through their purchases of guns and ammunition.
- ✓ Hunting-related photos posted to social media present something of a double-edged sword: while many hunters are fond of taking and posting such photos, the survey found that 40% of Americans believe that posting a photo to social media of an animal that has been hunted does *not* show respect for wildlife (this sentiment also emerged in the focus groups).
- ✓ Similarly, social media posts about hunting and sport shooting may impact public approval of the two activities: in the survey, 25% of Americans had seen a social media post about hunting or hunters that they found offensive, while 14% had seen a similar type of post about firearms or target/sport shooters.



The full report includes more detailed discussions of these and other findings from the study, as well as comprehensive results from each phase of the project and a full description of the research methods.

For a copy of the final report, please contact Jim Curcuruto, Executive Director of the Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation (jim@stewardsofconservation.org) or Mark Damian Duda, Executive Director of Responsive Management (mark@responsivemanagement.com).

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