

3 Small Arms Perception Survey (SAPS)

3.1 Perceptions of security

A strong sense of discontent and insecurity pervaded the FGDs, with participants often dwelling on the serious economic and social problems that Bulgaria has struggled with for many years, including low incomes, unemployment, high crime, corruption and a public culture of impunity. Great distrust in the state and its institutions was expressed at any opportunity and government-led reforms of various kinds criticised. In general, expectations were pessimistic, perhaps unduly so. Events such as NATO membership and moves towards EU accession were often framed in terms of the imposition of Western conditions. Perhaps only the younger participants felt uncomfortable with the negative mood of which other discussants seemed accustomed to. Young people in discussions were more likely to emphasise the role that individuals can play in changing conditions and to talk in the first person rather than third person terms, “Everyone complains that the state isn’t functioning. If everyone realises that he or she is part of this state, as individuals or part of the group, they can help the state develop.” (V,5).¹⁹⁹

In general, FGDs on security issues evoked a certain nostalgia for times past, and people sometimes questioned whether there could be security nowadays at all, “There isn’t a single aspect of security that we didn’t lose.” (I,8). HHS results showed economic concerns to be paramount, with arms and violence rated by very few as a major factor causing insecurity (see Figure 17). When asked how the level of their personal security had changed during the last year, just under 10 percent of respondents stated that it had deteriorated, while most (79.2 percent) felt it to be stable.

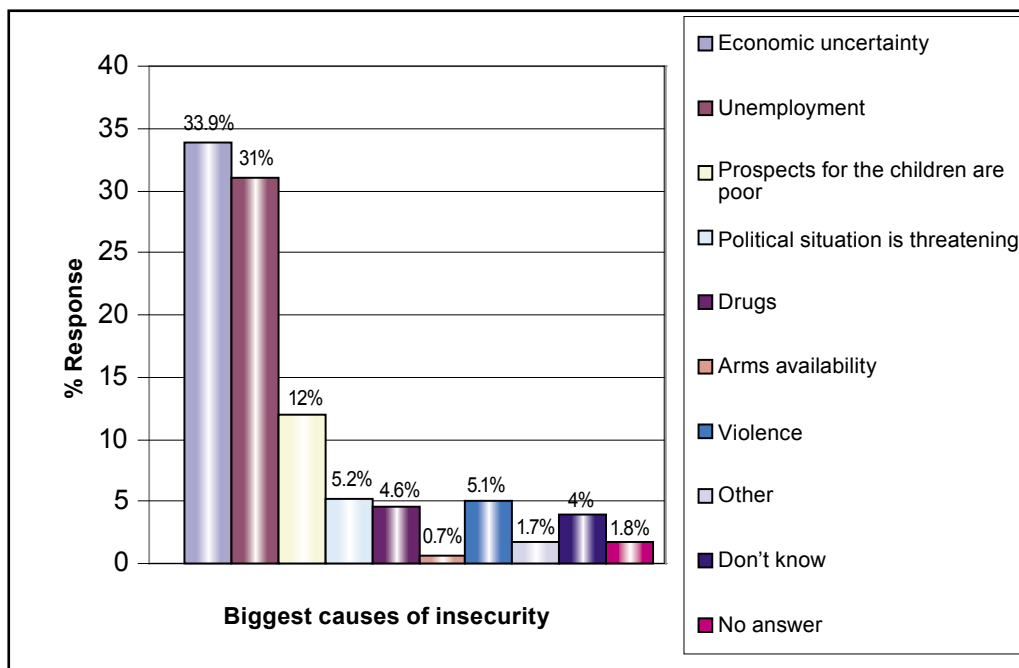


Figure 17: What is the biggest cause of insecurity to you personally and to your family? Base N = 1250.

The question of crime tended to dominate discussions of security and despite only 17 percent of people falling to crime annually²⁰⁰ the HHS found that a majority of Bulgarians are afraid they will become a victim of crime in the future. Crimes against property were uppermost in people’s minds, with burglary rated as the most common crime committed against people in the previous three months:

¹⁹⁹ Information contained in this section of the report is derived largely from the findings of FGDs and HHS conducted around the country during July 2004. References to comments made during FGDs denote the number of focus group (Roman numeral), and respondent (Arabic numerals), as detailed further in Annex A.

²⁰⁰ Bezlov et al. 2005, p.5.

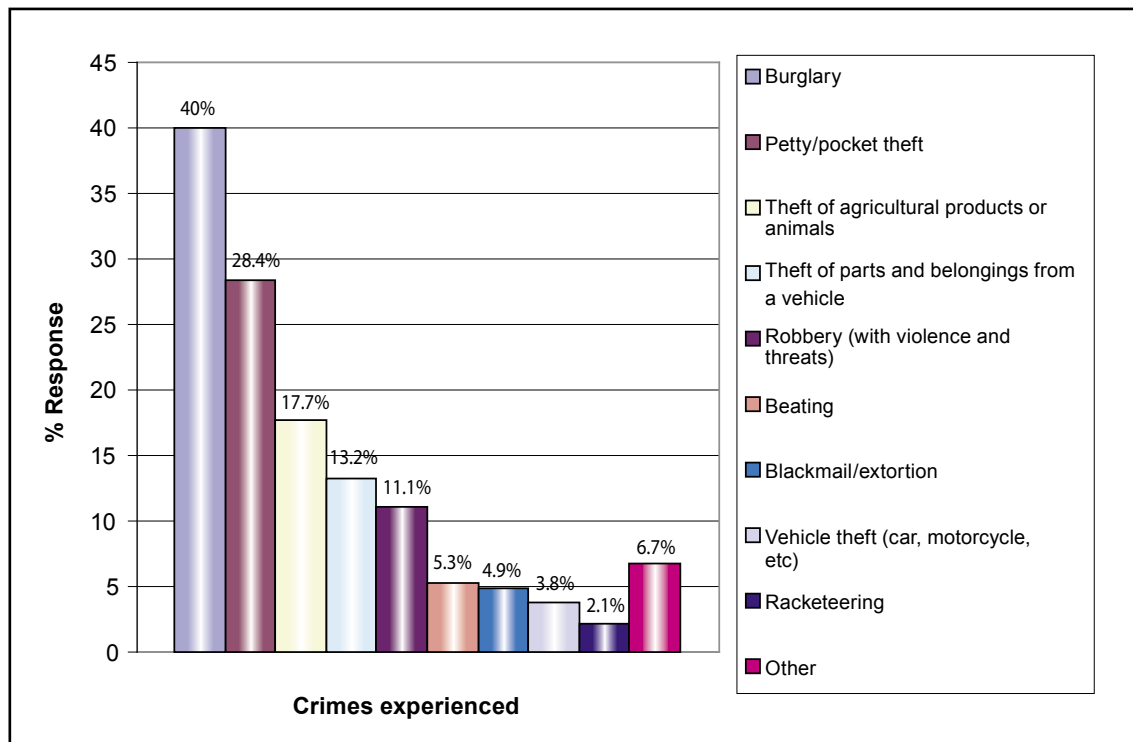


Figure 18: Of what crime were you or your household a victim? (during the last three months) (Base = 91).

In FGDs it was clear that most participants blame the Roma minority for the bulk of these crimes. Participants had some idea of Roma living conditions, but most perceived the Roma as not wanting to work. For their part, the Roma FGD participants felt threatened by discrimination and racial violence meted out to the darker-skinned boys in the community by ‘skinheads’, ‘normal Bulgarian boys’ and the police (VI,3,8,9). They noted that whenever there is unemployment or poverty, their community comes out worst and that these conditions explain the criminalisation of some Roma, “90 percent in the state steal. The big fishes steal, using documents and stuff. We from the minorities steal, but not as they do.” (VI,2).

Other forms of theft and violence against the person were also serious concerns for FGD participants. Less visible forms of crime such as tax dodging or the misuse of official powers were raised frequently in discussions and were seen as indicative of a moral decline that has occurred since 1989. ‘The state’ was often said to be ultimately to blame for causing these crimes.

Feelings of insecurity vary by region with the rich and propertied in Sofia and Varna experiencing high anxiety. The Kyrdzhali and Kazanlak groups (where the contraction of the defence industry has led to higher unemployment) were more likely to point to unemployment, low or irregular incomes, inadequate social security systems and inequality as their major concerns. In Gotse Delchev participants felt that compared to other areas they have relatively low levels of unemployment and crime. Instead, it was the national problem with organised crime and day-to-day law-breaking that concerned them most. Like the ethnic-Turkish group in Kyrdzhali, this group noted the existence of inter-ethnic tension in the area.

FGDs allowed respondents to elaborate on the social tensions in contemporary Bulgaria that concern them most:

- **Rich vs Poor:** the rich, it is said, can afford anything, be it goods or power, “they pay in advance to prevent control.” (V1,3,5,6,7).
- **People vs Politicians:** “they ruined the country in 14 years both economically and morally and they continue to do so.” (II,2).
- **Ethnic Majority vs Minorities:** some members of ethnic-Bulgarian groups showed hostility of varying degrees towards Pomaks and Turks. During the discussion in Gotse Delchev, Pomaks were said to have large stores of

arms, and to have a residual gun culture (11,3,5,8,10). Recurrent suspicion of the Turkish minority, sometimes hostility, was apparent in the other focus groups as well (see Box 9). Conflict between the majority population and the Roma minority is much more overt. Some Roma, it was said by participants, “gather in crowds to steal”, while others do so to cope with racism. Before too long some suggest, “those who are robbed will start to shoot.”

- **State vs Citizens:** ‘the state’ is often referred to in discussions as an alien entity, as distinct from particular politicians, parties or institutions. In this formulation the state is accused either of being unable to solve social problems, or unwilling to do so because of certain interests. The problems with crime and insecurity are no exception it seems, “the state generated this insecurity.” (1,11), “the state doesn’t want security. For fourteen years already it tolerated this powerlessness, this lawlessness that reigns outdoors.” (1,8).

Box 9: Attitudes towards the Turkish minority

Recurrent suspicion of the Turkish minority, sometimes hostility, was apparent in focus groups across the country. Memories of the conflict with Bulgaria’s Turks, however short-lived, were quite fresh. Some FG participants raised the possibility that members of the ethnic Turk community might, in extremis, take revenge one day for the expulsions that occurred during the 1980s.

“They bear hatred towards us, that is why they are arming in case some day...if inspired...some day they may rise, they just need a sign, they are united. In Macedonia...without being offended, having their names changed, they rebelled. And what about ours here... if they set their mind to send us off from here, as in Kosovo, they will do it.” (11,3,4,5,10).

The backdrop to this animosity is the empowerment of the Turkish population in recent years and the increased political influence of the ethnic-Turkish party, Movement for Rights and Freedoms. In recent years ethnic Turks have become economically better off. Ethnic Bulgarians, though they have not suffered as a result, apparently feel nervous at the rapid advancement of the Turks, and by extension, Pomaks (curiously women took a much more active interest in this question, and seemed more concerned than men that the continuing advancement of ethnic minorities could have negative consequences for ethnic Bulgarians.)

During a discussion in Kyrdzhali among ethnic Turks, participants also raised fears about ethnic conflict arising out of political manipulation. They emphasised their peacefulness and what they saw as the cynical manoeuvrings of politicians who might instigate trouble. Like ethnic Bulgarians, they sometimes referred to the case of the former Yugoslavia and Kosovo as demonstrating the ease with which ethnic conflict can be fomented.

3.2 Perceptions of security providers

Of those HHS respondents who claimed to have fallen victim to crime, a small minority stated that they had contacted the police and the crime had been solved. More than a third claimed not to have contacted the police at all.

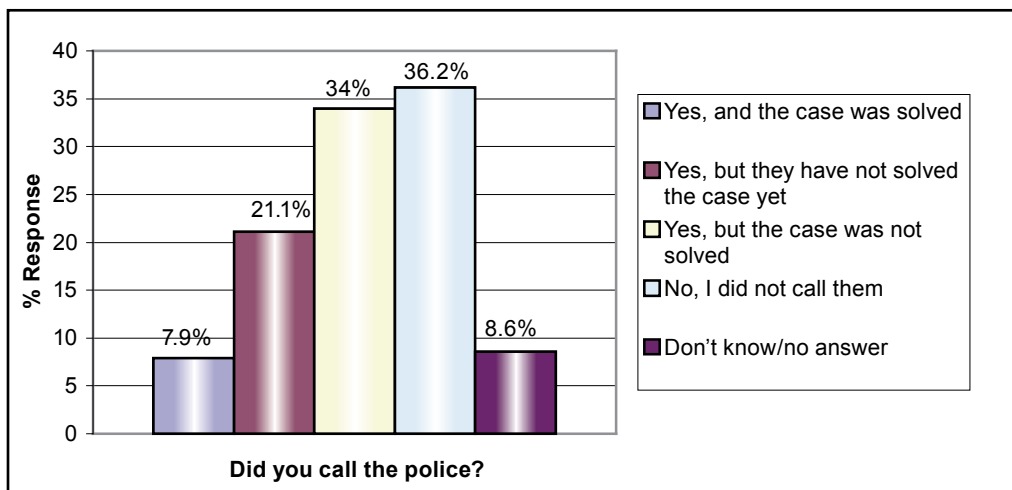


Figure 19: Did you call the police? (Base N = 91).



In FGDs the police were typically described as being ineffective, inadequate, uninterested and unprofessional. Numerous personal experiences were recounted of waiting in vain for police help after a crime, or of the tortuous procedures for making statements that use up a ‘bucket of ink’ without results. It seems that even in small towns people feel they cannot rely on the police. “18 and 19 year-old boys, just finished their military service become policemen. They have no presence, no physique. They don’t inspire respect, they’re not authoritative.” (III,10,11). Allegations of police corruption were also frequently made, particularly in regard to the domestic firearm permit system which many participants claim is rife with corruption. “Push them some money and you’re ready. No one asks who you are, where you are from or why...500 Leva – 200 Leva for the course itself, 300 Leva for the ‘sponsorship’.” A typical scenario was described in this way, “They came, gave us the questions in advance, we paid. Then they filled out the forms and left.” (II,5). Although some participants said they had filed applications for a weapons permit, but given up because they found the procedures too onerous, no one stated that the reason they do not, or could not, obtain a weapon was that they cannot get a licence. Respondents also claimed that Mol has problems in exercising authority over applicants from the military, since military personnel find it humiliating to have ‘some sergeant-major’ assess their fitness to bear arms.

Yet while the NPS did not appear to inspire a great deal of confidence in most participants, HHS results showed that state institutions are the first that people look to for security, with the police registering by far the highest rating of any agency that would be used in case of future criminality (75.1 percent in cases of threat to the person).

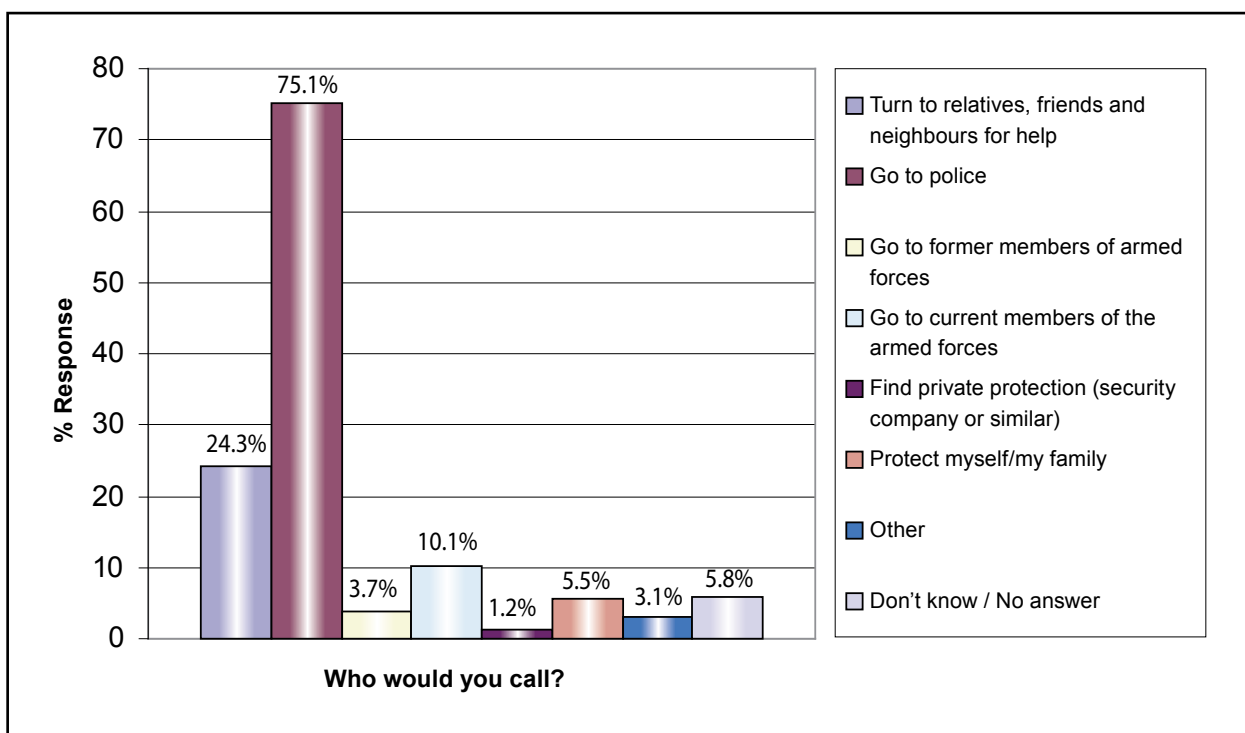


Figure 20: Who would you call if someone threatened you or a member of your family? (Base N = 1,250).

People insist that the state must do its job. In spite of the popularity of private security companies they were not perceived as a substitute for the police. The attitude of resignation towards the police was summed up by one respondent thus, “we have the uniforms, so why not have someone walking around in them?” (III,7).

An important exception to this is the feelings of Roma FGD participants, who did genuinely seem to fear the police and resent the way they are treated by many officers.²⁰¹ Roma participants ascribed their frequent run-ins with police officers to a mean temperament on the part of the officers, which leads them to, “target us just

²⁰¹ There have been a number of cases where international attention has been drawn to police brutality against Roma in police custody. A survey in 2001 found that 40% of interviewed prisoners reported police officers using physical force against them during arrest. US Department of State, 2003.

because we are gypsies”. They stated that there were no circumstances under which they would seek police help, because they believe no one would take their side. It was more common for Roma participants to allege that the police are themselves criminalised.

However, not all the blame was placed on the police. A good number of other FGD participants expressed the view that the police arrest criminals but then the courts set them free, leaving the police de-motivated. They also understand that police officers are lowly paid and need more respect, “in England they are armed only with sticks but they inspire respect.” Even those who criticise the police harshly feel that they are not the root of the problem, “No matter whether he carries a stick or a gun, whether there are two Kalashnikovs or a tank, if there is no state behind his back...”

There was spontaneous mention of a new proposal currently being debated in some circles in Bulgaria: residents’ organisations formed specifically to watch over private property. These voluntary units, more a topic for discussion than a reality at this point in time, appear to be something between a ‘neighbourhood watch’ and a militia. The idea behind such organisations is that propertied, and therefore motivated, citizens form a mutual-protection society composed of volunteers. The deterrent effect of arms is seen as being central to the success of these groups, though those who give the most vocal support for such organisations often appear to have retribution for past crimes in mind.

3.3 Knowledge of SALW

Although most FGDs participants considered themselves as ‘partially’ aware of small arms issues, general knowledge of the topic was strong, and a good number of individuals (particularly males) displayed detailed knowledge. Participants’ knowledge and understanding of the issues was determined largely by the source of their information. The following groups of people showed a good degree of awareness:

- **Males:** the highest levels of awareness were seen among ex-soldiers or weapon-owners. These individuals took greater interest in the arms market and the domestic proliferation and regulation of arms (I,4,6,7; II,2,5,7; IV; II,5; I,2, 3, III,6,7,3; V,9,11,12; VI,1,3).
- **Females:** those who trained for sports shooting in their younger days, or had family members whose profession connected them to weapons, had a good level of awareness (II, 3, 11). It was also more usual for those who had gained their knowledge from books, films, or friends, to be female, (I,3,5,9,10 and II,12).

There were of course those who demonstrated little or no knowledge or interest, in some cases despite having served in the military (I,8). Young people (16–21 years) most often fell into this category (VI, 2,4,5,6,7,8,9).

Safe handling: Basic awareness of safe storage procedures tended to be high:

	GUNS SHOULD ALWAYS BE STORED UNLOADED	GUNS SHOULD ALWAYS BE STORED LOCKED, WHEN NOT IN USE
Strongly agree	80.0 %	83.2 %
Somehow agree	10.2 %	7.9 %
Neither agree not disagree	2.3 %	1.6 %
Somehow disagree	0.3 %	0.4 %
Strongly disagree	0.6 %	0.7 %
Don't know/No answer	6.5 %	6.2 %

Table 27: To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements? (Base N = 1250).



However, even among those who had a basic awareness of small arms, the type of knowledge exhibited varied. It was not uncommon, for example, to find a male FGD participant who had done military service, been trained to shoot, but did not know how to store or handle weapons.

- **Domestic laws:** Most male FG participants had a broad idea of the procedure for obtaining a weapon licence, which includes submitting an application form, taking an exam, learning to shoot and taking a psychological examination. They were aware that the Mol oversees the application procedure and that in order to be legally allowed a weapon for self-defence, a justification must be offered (the example commonly given is that one is a small businessman who carries lots of cash on a regular basis). They were also aware that it is forbidden to carry arms in a public place and that weapons must be stored in securely in the home.
- **Production:** Leaving aside the participants of the FGD held in Kazanlak, whose members were ex-Arsenal employees, a sizeable number of respondents were familiar with Bulgaria's production companies, their locations, names, products and even prices. The military plants at Kazanlak and Sopot are clearly well known, while those at Lyaskovetz, Tyrgovishte and others have a lower profile. The plants that had been connected in some way with scandals (eg illegal exports, thefts) were well-remembered for their connection to those events. Awareness of Bulgaria's association with the production of Kalashnikovs was fairly universal, the AK-47 being highly lauded, but enthusiasts among the respondents could also reel off the names of a range of brands, from Shipka to Zig-Zauer and Berettas. Home-made weapons were also commented on as being popular, as were electric-shock weapons and gas-spray guns.

3.4 Perceptions of 'gun culture'

FGD participants tended to be of the opinion that although Bulgaria has a proud history of producing and exporting weapons, there is no deeply embedded culture of weapons possession. Only 1.2 percent of HHS respondents thought that tradition is one of the main reasons why Bulgarians want to possess weapons. Instead, most FGD participants trace Bulgaria's current problems with SALW back to the difficult transition from Communism, and to recent increases in crime, particularly the organised variety. It was clear from most discussions that participants feel Bulgaria is different and better off than its neighbours with respect to gun culture and SALW proliferation more generally.

Although this is probably true, a few qualifications may be in order. Firstly, HHS questions on the topic of celebratory fire produced some unexpected responses. Of the 12 percent of HHS respondents who claimed they had personally witnessed the use of a weapon, 50.4 percent claimed that the weapon was used at a celebration. This finding was backed-up in FGDs, where many respondents claimed that celebratory shooting is all too common on public holidays, at weddings and at traditional country gatherings. Secondly, it is worth noting that Bulgarians attach a special prestige to hunting and to the use of weapons for this purpose. As Figure 26 in section 3.8 shows, 'sports shooting / hunting', is the third most commonly cited reason among HHS respondents for wanting to own a legal gun (32.3 percent). Hunting has always been perceived as an elite activity in Bulgaria. During the Communist era, party leaders were well known for their apparent love of the sport, at a time when most citizens were denied this right. Today, although hunting is accessible to anyone who can afford it, the image of the hunting elite continues to capture the popular imagination. Recently, a leading daily newspaper devoted a double-page spread to an examination of the hunting habits of key politicians and business leaders, paying special attention to their choice of weapons.²⁰² The country's flourishing legal trade in weapons, serviced as it is by numerous gun shops, magazines and websites is ample proof of, if not a 'gun culture', then a 'gun sub-culture'.

3.5 Perceptions regarding the availability of SALW

There was a widely held view among FGD participants that small arms are easily available across the country. The first channel that came to people's minds during discussions is the nationwide network of gun shops, with the black market mentioned second. For many, the black market trade was associated with open-air markets where it was said that Russian, Chinese and sometimes Bulgarian-made weapons can be bought. Several participants cited markets in the towns of Dimitrovgrad and Blagoevgrad as obvious places to buy weapons, "I was at the

²⁰² *Trud*, 16 September 2004.



market...saw a kettle and I liked it...I asked how much it was...and the guy, a Russian, says ‘you want a full set or not?’ He opened the kettle and inside there was a Makarov pistol.” (II,5). The NSCOC, however, has not found these markets to be of any higher risk than other markets in the country.²⁰³ FGD participants would insist that if you want a weapon illegally, it can always be found, “there are people for anything everywhere.”, “if one asks, the answer will come from somewhere.” (III,6,7,8,10,11; V,3,4,6,7,10; V,2,3,6; VI,6).

Those wishing to obtain more sophisticated weapons were advised by group members that they are not so easily available – contacts and references are necessary at several levels of the networks. This also avoids the troublesome legal procedures, “you may have to send back the same documents a hundred times, and each time the state takes a fee.” (I,4).

In fact, participants clearly felt that the legal and illegal channels for SALW in Bulgaria overlap considerably and are often controlled by the same people. Firstly, the idea that registered gun shops somehow sell illegal weapons was occasionally raised, though no evidence was offered. Secondly, some participants sensed a more profound blurring between legal and illegal channels. These people held that the “big fish”, the “strong men of the day”, have interests in both markets, sometimes naming prominent businessmen (II,2,3,5,10). Presumably many years of corrupt public administration, scandals at arms producing plants, and high-profile illicit exports have left these participants cynical about all those who deal in, or purport to control, arms.

Manufacturing plants

When asked where weapons are most common, or most easily acquired, participants spontaneously respond Kazanlak: “you go to Kazanlak,...enter into a café and ask.” (III,6,7,11; V,7).

Most participants considered it quite obvious, and not a matter deserving great approbation, that ex-production line workers from the arms plants have now turned to illegal, home-based production of small arms. The case of Arsenal was always cited, where lay-offs have been severe. It was said to be a routine operation to modify a Russian Izh gas-spray gun, which can be easily equipped to take live cartridges, “any good fitter can do this, and there are tens of thousands of fitters who sit unemployed.” (I,6). Since those still working at the plants are badly paid, they consider it natural that some succumb to the temptation to smuggle parts out. “You put a barrel under your shirt and leave.” (I,6,7; II,5).

The public’s perception of widespread illegal theft by Arsenal employees was contradicted by members of the Kazanlak FGD, which was comprised mainly of ex-Military Representatives employed jointly by the MoD and Arsenal to ensure Quality Control. They insisted that each barrel is individually marked during manufacture and logged and that this documentation is securely stored. They claimed to have heard of the occasional attempt to smuggle parts out, but that these had been few and people who attempt it would be caught. Their concerns centred more on ‘half-legal deals’ and the antics of ‘big bosses’. Many were convinced that networks of crooks do benefit in some way from dubious shipments out of the plants, but that these people have political protection. They remember the strikes of more than a decade ago, and claimed that occasionally during that period, trucks filled with weapons left the plant for an unknown destination.

Those living in more rural areas suggest Sofia as the place to purchase a firearm: “the biggest crime is there, the biggest market is there.” (II,2). Even participants in Gotse Delchev who saw their own area as associated with illegal weapon trafficking to some degree, pointed to Sofia as the place to buy a weapon, because, “here you have to know somebody who is a trafficker...here it is a small city, he will be afraid to sell to a non-native.” (II,7). Among this group those who acknowledged that trafficking activities go on still had an impression of it being a small-scale business that involves one or two weapons at a time.

Distribution from state institutions

As previously noted, with the dissolution of Communist-era state structures in the 1990s, some weapons were distributed in an unplanned way. FGD participants claimed that when the ODC was dissolved, pneumatic guns were sold off first, then small-calibre military weapons. According to one former ODC employee, “they took them

²⁰³ Interview, Gaidarski, 09 November 2004.



to Blagoevgrad, then to Sofia and I didn't see where they went...and I haven't seen Margolin pistols sold in any of the gun shops." (II,7). The participants' common perception was that the higher-ranking military officers and state officials would furnish themselves with several weapons, each free of charge. But the previous Communist-era control systems were also thought to have been corrupt, and the regulations for the purchase of weapons by those for with long service widely disregarded: "no one was observing it...if there were fifty people in the regiment, give the list and it's done." (II,5). "There lies the real trouble, then every second person got a gun." (II,7).

Stockpile thefts

FGD members were also in no doubt that official stockpiles of weapons and ammunition continue to be stolen, with some participants claiming that thefts are usually an inside job (II,5,7). They recalled numerous cases where weapons had disappeared from military depots, either gradually or suddenly (I,1). "During 1993, 16,000 machine-gun bullets disappeared, five boxes." (II,5). "I was responsible for the arms and was compiling the statistics. During my employment, each year up until 1995, 40–50 automatic guns were stolen from the ground forces, and 60–70 pistols, throughout Bulgaria. After that time it was smaller scale, but thefts still went on." (II,5).

Cross-border smuggling

When discussing cross-border SALW smuggling, FGD participants would often contrast the relatively small profits made by the individuals doing the dirty work of carrying weapons across borders, with the real money said to be made by the bosses, 'millionaires from Petrich', 'local and central guys in power.' These respondents also felt that nowadays private companies export arms illegally under the protection of the state using false customs documents and other types of fraud. The proof was said to lie in the fact that the media sometimes reports a case that is later hushed up, and also in the fact that an ordinary citizen cannot register to import and export arms without paying \$20,000 for a permit (II).

"I crossed the border with Macedonia twice in the past to sell fuel during the war in Bosnia". (II)

"We sold 100 mortars to Macedonia but they never reached Macedonia. Rather, they entered Skopje, then went to Belgrade and from there to Bosnia." (II)

- Respondents discuss trafficking between South Eastern Bulgaria and Macedonia.

In the FGD held in the south east of the country, it was clear that the trade in small arms which has taken place over the years with Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was popular. Although official transactions have occurred, respondents tended to focus more on the illicit trading which has happened, particularly during periods of crisis. One interesting perception was that whereas in the past, the trade was predominantly one of exports from Bulgaria, now, the traffic goes both ways. The examples given did not just include cross-border trafficking by individuals, but 'wholesale' deals in which stocks held in army depots were sold with the complicity of officers. The attitude to this business appeared to be one of acceptance. Even so, participants in this group asserted that an international network, or networks, controls the black market in arms, the routes and actors often being linked with drug trafficking. Groups singled out for their involvement in these networks included ethnic Albanians, Pomaks and Bulgarian special forces. Pomaks were thought to have good knowledge of the 'green border' areas where official crossing points do not exist.

3.6 Perceived distribution of SALW

Some FGD participants were not shy of figures (quite different from the real ones), stating that there are "up to 500,000" official weapons owners in the country (I,6); that 240,000 hunters are registered (IV,1,8); or that up to 80 percent of owners and managers of commercial companies possess personal arms (I,3). According to one participant, there are, "at least as many illegal arms as there are legal ones" (II,5). When asked to justify these claims, respondents would point to cases of thefts from military depots, the uncontrolled distribution of official stocks in the 1990s, and the make-shift production of weapons by home producers. According to some participants, there are lots of people "just walking around with guns" despite the law to the contrary. Although 31 percent of respondents stated that one cannot see people other than security forces carrying weapons anywhere, other respondents claimed that firearms can be seen in a number of different locations:

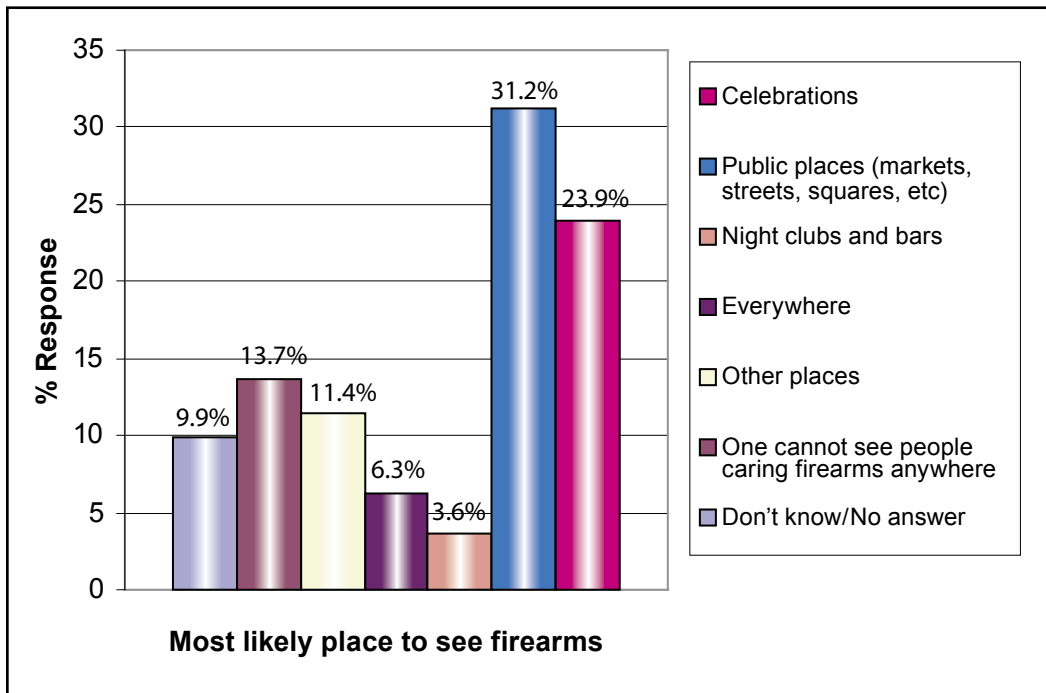


Figure 21: Where are you most likely to see people (excluding police or army) carrying firearms in your town? (Base N = 1250).

While the Kalashnikov assault rifle is commonly identified by FGD participants as Bulgaria’s ‘best’ weapon, it is not thought to be widely available in the country. In contrast hunting rifles and Makarov pistols, of varying legality, were felt to be widely available. Modified and home-made weapons were also said to be widely available and the overwhelming feeling is that make-shift factories staffed by skilled workers from downsized arms plants are manufacturing or modifying sizeable numbers of weapons (see also section 1.2.2.3 for the results of in-depth interviews with factory workers).

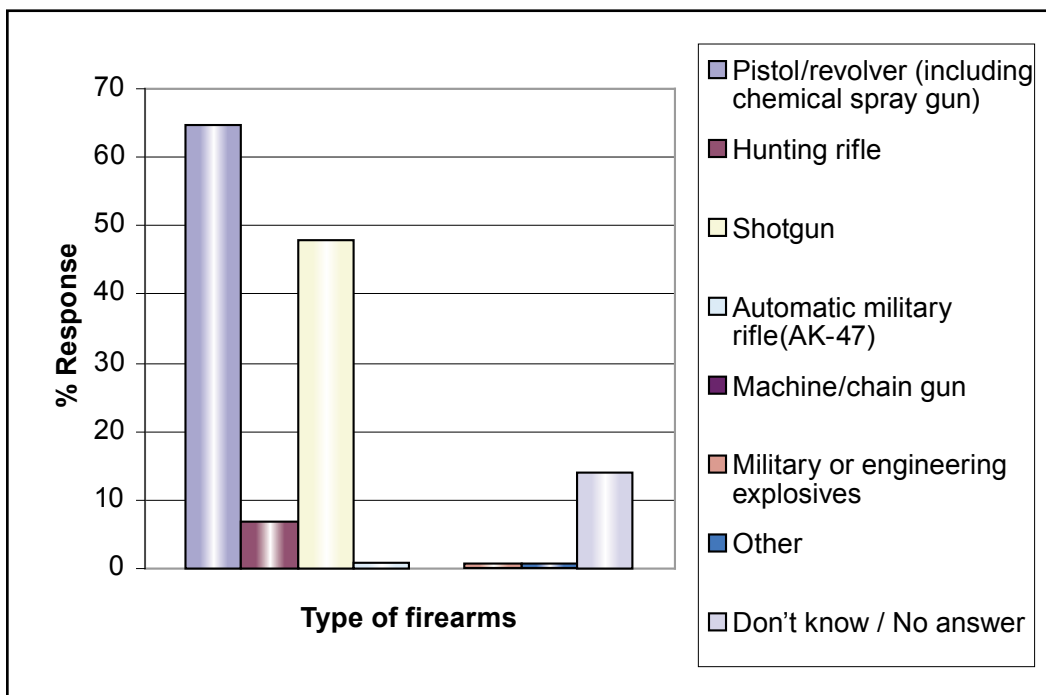


Figure 22: What type of firearms do you know that people from your neighbourhood have? (Base N = 312).



Just under a third (29.1 percent) of HHS respondents felt that all or most gun owners behave responsibly, while a majority felt either that many irresponsible people own firearms (40.8 percent), or that only a few gun owners are responsible (21.1 percent). As section 2 shows, the level of firearms casualties in Bulgaria is low by the standards of the region. Other factors such as the high visibility of weapons in public places, visibly poor handling standards, or the frequency of celebratory shooting might well explain this response.

FGD participants identified a number of different social groups as likely to have legal weapons, namely the military and police, private and public security guards, former members of the security forces, businesspersons, farmers, owners of companies, country houses, farms and other types of real estate. HHS results show that perceived levels of gun ownership (legal and otherwise) by social group broke down as follows:

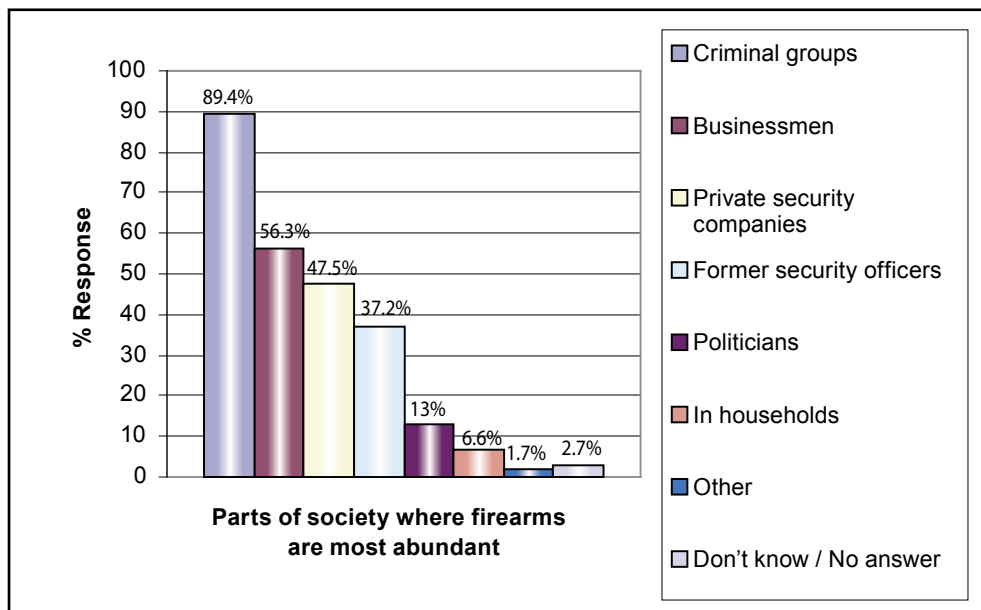


Figure 23: In which parts of Bulgarian society are firearms most abundant (except in the police, army, gendarmerie, etc?) (Base N = 651).

Particular geographic or social patterns were also identified in FGDs – areas close to military depots or factories, mountainous areas, villages and Turkish regions were all cited as having higher than average levels of weapons proliferation. In the FG held in Gotse Delchev, participants claimed that small arms are unusually common in the area and that the weapons held certainly include illegal ones. Participants also stated that the trafficking of weapons occurs in the area. Among this group the gun-fights that occurred between local criminal gangs some years ago were seen as evidence of the incidence of trafficking and illegal possession (II,10). The age group identified as most likely to have weapons was the 26–35 year-old bracket, with 36–50 year olds coming second. Nineteen to twenty-five year olds were only rated by 9.2 percent of respondents as the most likely age group to possess weapons. The Roma discussion group members’ estimated that ‘up to ten percent’ (VI, 1,4,6) of their communities have illegal guns, a result that would confound the Bulgarian public who do not perceive the Roma as being armed.

3.7 Perceived impact of SALW

FGDs indicate that although the public perceives the level of weapons proliferation in Bulgaria to be significant, it is seen as much lower than that of Western Balkan states. The relatively low priority that HHS respondents give to firearms problems in comparison to other factors shows how widespread this view is:

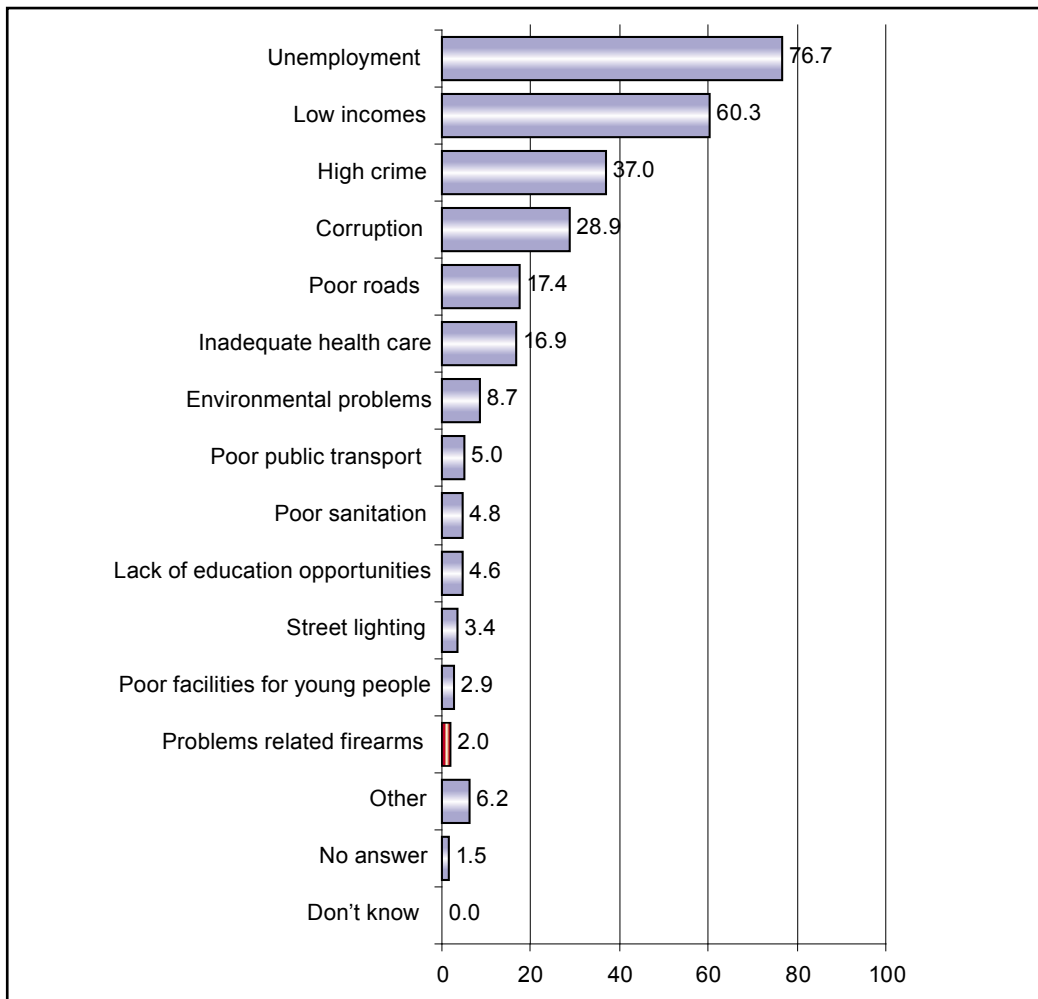


Figure 24: In your opinion, what are the three worst problems your community faces at this time? (Base N = 1250)

The effects too are not felt to be severe. However, in line with participants' negative feelings about the future, concerns were aired that should conditions in the country worsen further, the arms market that apparently functions well enough could blossom further. As noted above, 41 percent of respondents agree that firearms are a concern to their community, though it may not be their paramount concern. The HHS showed that respondents had nuanced views about the security implications of weapon possession. Respondents were split as to whether personal possession improves security for the individual, but those who believed that it does were less inclined to say that personal possession also improves communal or family security.

	SAFER	MAKES NO DIFFERENCE	LESS SAFE	NO SECURITY AT ALL	DON'T KNOW / NO ANSWER
The individual	42.2	19.0	8.8	16.5	13.5
His family	33.6	21.6	11.0	19.2	14.6
Community in general	10.4	17.9	20.5	34.8	16.5

Table 28: In your opinion, to what extent does personal firearms possession increase the level of security of... (Base N = 1250)

The HHS results also showed a clear correlation between those respondents who had never seen people carrying firearms in their neighbourhood (apart from the police and army officers that is), and perceptions of



community safety. Of those who never saw firearms in their area, 21.1 percent felt that the level of security of their neighbourhood was higher than elsewhere, a percentage that was far lower among those who claimed to see weapons around regularly. By and large, the younger FGD participants felt that obtaining, or learning to handle weapons was not something of interest.

3.8 Attitude towards SALW possession and use

“Arms? I adore them.” (II, 8)
 “I like the way they look.” (III,8)
 “I’m terrified by the thought that I may be touching something like that.” (I, 11)
 “They should invent a weapon to destroy all weapons.” (I,1)

When weapons were first mentioned in FGDs, participants displayed a range of emotional attitudes from indifference, through to fear, disgust or pride. Some associated weapons with danger, others with protection. For some, weapons meant pleasure, for others, they were just seen as a regrettable necessity.

Negative: Those most likely to display negative emotions towards small arms were: females, the best- educated, the least-educated, the young, and members of ethnic minorities. Those with negative

attitudes towards weapons tended to associate them with a set of uncontrollable risks, either for society or the user, risks connected with the carriage and storage of weapons.

The majority of FGD participants had no intention of acquiring weapons. The reasons they gave were few in number and recurrent:

- Fear of guns (association between firearms and risk).
- The perceived uselessness of guns.
- Absence of perceived threat (particularly common among respondents from small towns).
- A preference for other methods of self-defence (including knives (III; VI), electric-shock weapons (III,9) and gas-spray guns (III,4).

HHS respondents opted for the following reasons not to own a legal weapon:

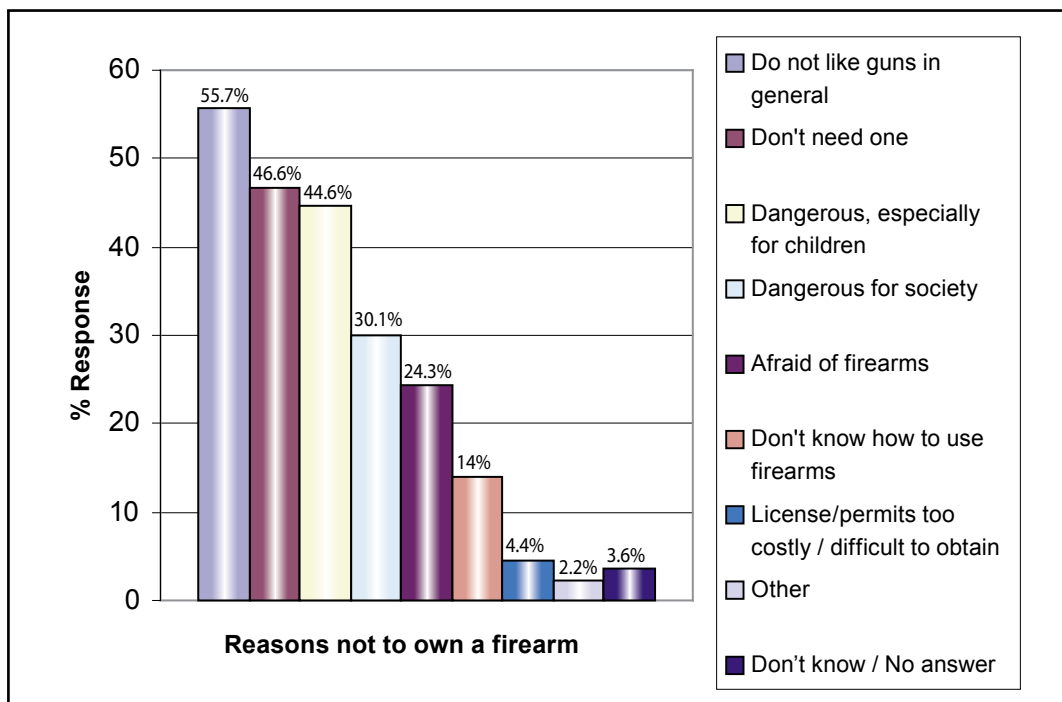


Figure 25: What are the three main reasons why you would choose not to own a firearm legally? (Base N = 922)

“Arms are dangerous, they are created to destroy.”

“More arms in the hands of the population means more murders, they should be totally eliminated.”

“You cannot just shoot anyone who will stand in your way – there should be some other way of handling things. The most important thing is to have dialogue.”

Only a tiny portion of HHS respondents (4.4 percent), cited a ‘costly and difficult’ permit application system as a reason why they would not choose to own a firearm. Indeed, the great majority of those who had already obtained firearms stated that the licensing regime did not discourage them from getting a firearm. If the current regime is discouraging only a small fraction of potential applicants, one might question the point of any relaxation of the permit application system. In fact, the public appear to be in favour of a stricter permit regime – a small majority of HHS respondents (50.5 percent) felt that a stricter system will increase security in Bulgarian society.

Those FGD participants who associated weapons with uncontrollable risk would refer variously to the inherent aggression within people, the stresses of everyday life, or the influence of drugs and alcohol as factors that might lead to the use of weapons. Several older males mentioned a desire to dispose of their weapons because of the trials that everyday life presents them, which they feel less-and-less able to cope with. All of these people feared that the weapon might turn against its owner, harming rather than helping him (I,7; IV,3,5,9; V,7). The problem of safe storage was also mentioned. The dominant perception was that there are an undue number of accidents in the country that are the resulting either from inept handling or poor storage practices. Some participants noted a desire to be rid of weapons lest they become a “dangerous toy”, for children (I,1; III,10, V,3).

Positive emotional reactions were more rare, and any approval was generally couched in more rational terms. One of the common justifications given was an admiration for design or functionality, with hunters, sports shooters, employees of weapons plants and the ex-military (generally men over thirty), being more likely to talk in these terms. The use of weapons for professional or recreational reasons was entirely accepted by these participants. Those who displayed an approving attitude were more likely to see the weapons themselves as having useful functions, including protection, and a means to acquire self-discipline. But although these respondents are more likely to talk of a ‘right’ to arms, most dwelt on the problem of crime and the state’s perceived inability to protect citizens. Several motives for possession emerged during FGDs:

- **General insecurity:** the most commonly expressed motivation was to deal with ‘insecure’, or ‘hard’ times (I,5, II, 10). When asked to explain further, participants would typically refer to a media story. The protection of family, and even more so, property, turned out to be the main motivation for gun ownership or acquisition.
- **Crime prevention:** participants with this motivation emphasised the impudence of today’s criminals and the idea that a ‘gun behind every door’ would deter them and reduce burglaries.
- **Retribution:** this group of participants were more radical, emphasising their desire to use weapons, particularly in case of burglary.
- **‘Just in case’:** as one participant put it, “it’s just the psychology of the Bulgarian, to have it, just in case.”
- **Thrill-seeking:** several FGD participants spoke of a ‘hunting instinct’, or ‘the thrill of shooting’. In the mountain region of Gotse Delchev this was the most commonly cited motivation. It was generally acknowledged that the use of weapons for hunting or sport is acceptable and even attracts prestige.
- **Professional reasons:** positive associations with small arms were strong among FG respondents in Kazanlak, whose working lives had revolved around weapons for many decades. For most, possessing a weapon is natural enough since it evokes craftsmanship and presumably creates nostalgia for the stable working environment of past times.

The ‘just in case’ mindset was often attributed by ethnic-Bulgarian participants to members of the Pomak and Turkish community. Most participants in the FGD held in Gotse Delchev were convinced that every Pomak house has a gun (II,5). Where ethnic minority participants did display this motivation at all, it was mainly evident among females.

Twenty-six percent of HHS respondents stated that if they or another member of their household could own a



firearm legally, they would choose to do so, with 67 percent answering ‘no’. Since only 6 percent of the respondents currently own a firearm, one might reasonably expect the number of firearm owners to increase in coming years if supplies remain available. Among those who possessed or aspired to possess weapons, there was a common enough range of declared motives, including self-defence, hunting, sport, status, or the collection of souvenirs (including awards to ex-military personnel).

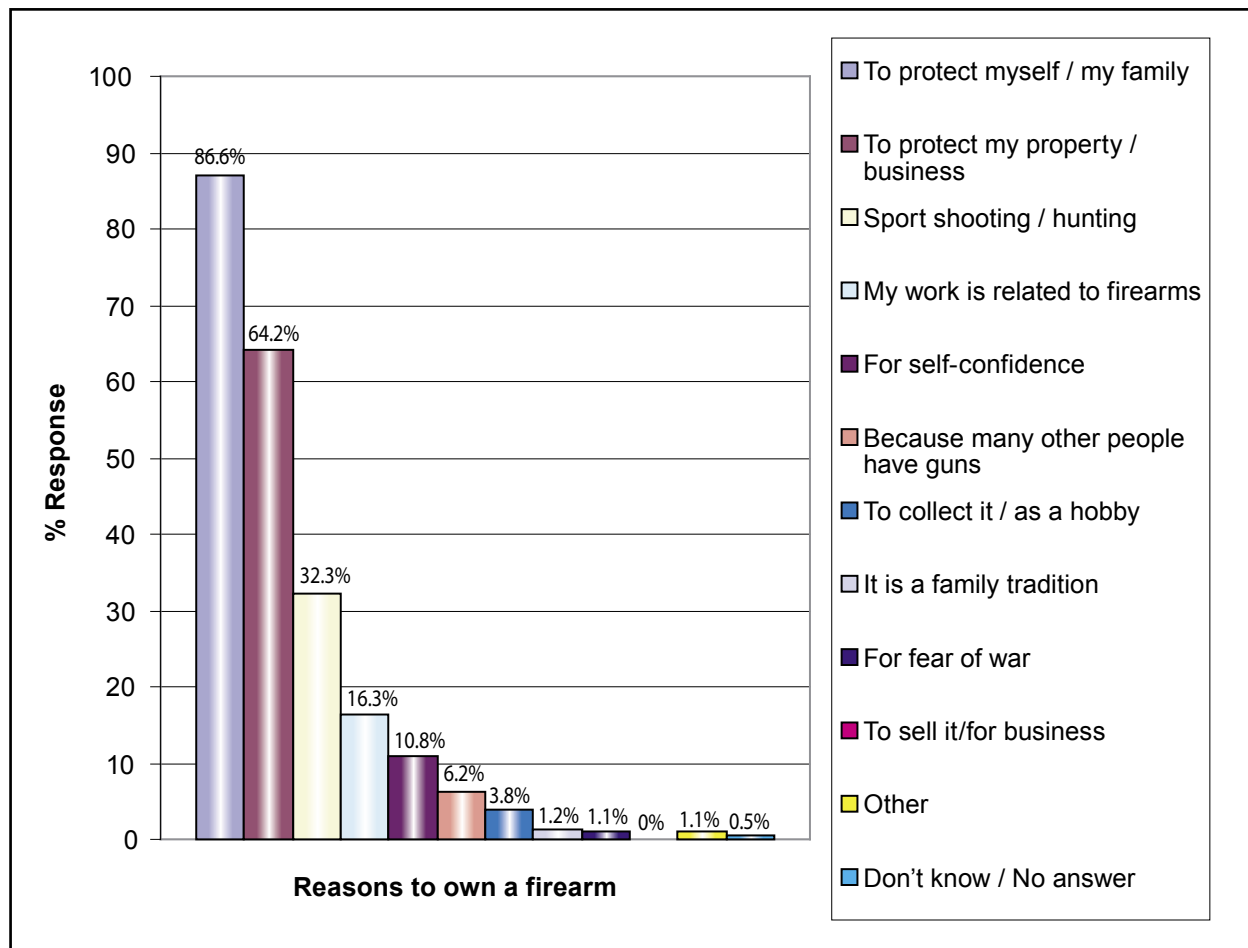


Figure 26: What are the three main reasons why you would choose to own a firearm legally? (Base N = 329).

When the motives for personal armament were probed further in FGDs, the crime prevention function weapons was usually emphasised, particularly in relation to property crime. Many participants had the idea that weapons do not need to be used, but only brandished at thieves in order for them to flee. In combination with an assumption that the state is unable to protect citizens from rising crime, this preventative notion apparently allows many who would not want to acquire a weapon themselves to sympathise with those who would. It appears that there is a certain degree of tolerance for citizens who acquire legal arms for self-protection, “I don’t approve of people who carry arms, but I am somehow aware that there is a need for it.” (V, 5, 6, 10).

The HHS showed that victims of crime are slightly more likely to be willing to purchase a firearm than those that have not been a victim.²⁰⁴ The table below shows how people with different experiences of crime answered the question: If you or other member of your household could own a firearm legally, would you choose to do so?

²⁰⁴ The question used in the HHS was, “Have you been victim to a crime in the *past three months*.” Since people’s attitudes towards weapons possession are likely to have been shaped by their experience over a period longer than three months, only tentative conclusions can be drawn on this relationship.

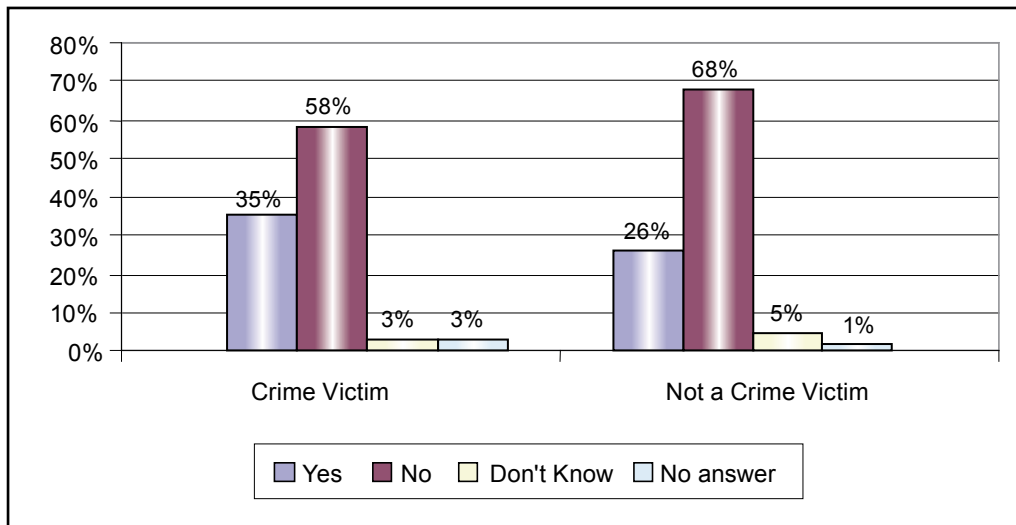


Figure 27: Victims of crime vs desire for weapons.

Whatever respondents' feelings about personal weapons possession, there was a widespread presumption among most that members of public bodies, whether concerned with government or security provision, should be permitted to keep weapons at home. Despite this, only two percent thought that any adult should be allowed to keep weapons at home, while 18 percent felt that no one should. There were also clear disparities between the views of the male and female populations, with women making up 62 percent of the respondents who believed that no one should be allowed to keep firearms at home.

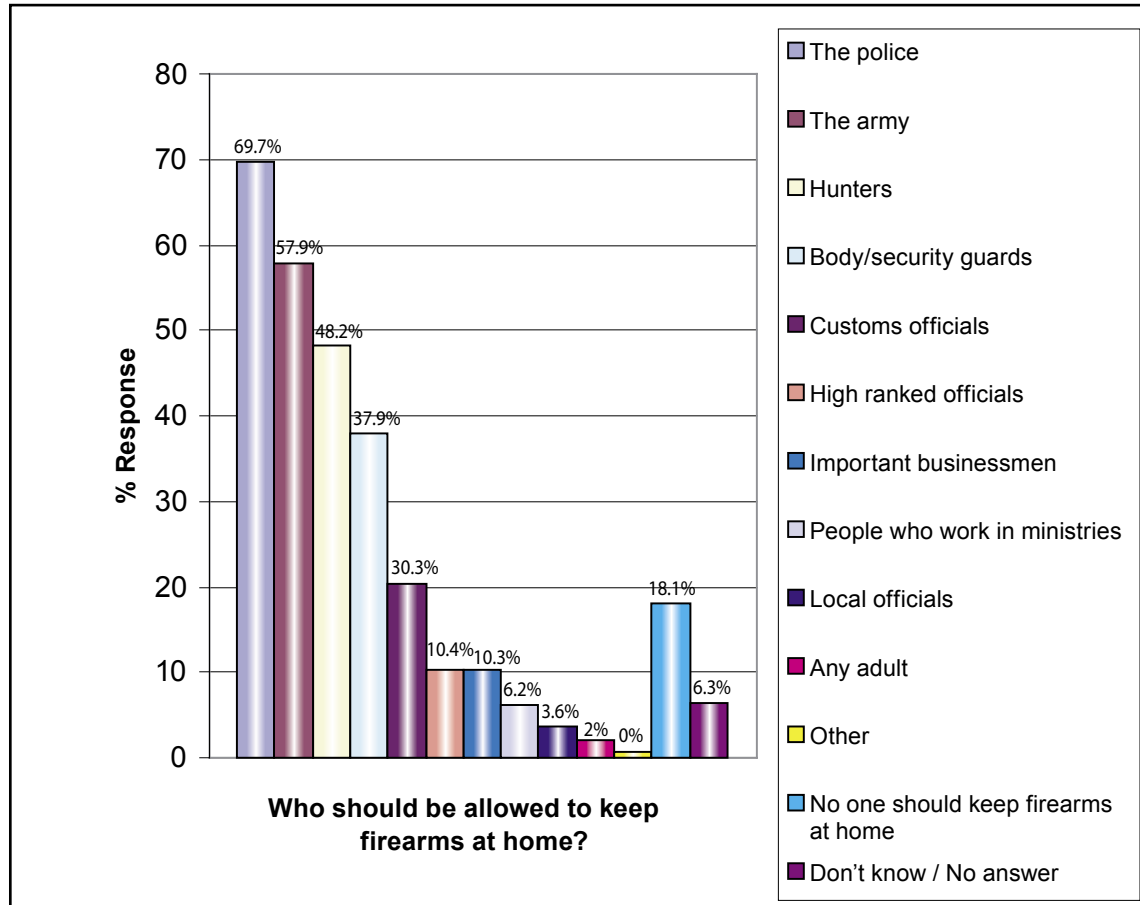


Figure 28: Who do you think should be legally allowed to keep firearms at home? (Base N = 1250).



Those with more liberal attitudes towards domestic gun control were more likely to claim a willingness to shoot criminals who invade their private property. They also tended to assess the current law as being unrealistic, “in reality the one who is attacked usually has no choice and no time to choose. It should be like in the USA – if anyone puts his foot on private property, you are allowed to shoot.” (I,1,2,5; VI), “I prefer to be guilty in the face of the law but to protect my family.” (I,2). Cases where the victim of an attack was unfairly convicted for killing or injuring thieves were mentioned (I,4), as was the futility of firing warning shots.

It was generally the wealthier focus group participants who expressed a readiness to administer instant justice with the help of firearms. The HHS also showed that wealthier respondents were more likely to express a desire to own a firearm. Yet very few respondents cited cost as a reason not to obtain a gun. If low income is not an impediment for gun ownership because of the perceived low costs, the attitude of wealthier respondents can be attributed to a desire to protect their material goods (it should also be borne in mind though, that the majority low-income respondents are older people or residents of villages and small towns where crime rates are much lower).

Box 10: Property-related crime in Bulgaria

Property-related crime has become the subject of a heated debate in contemporary Bulgaria, a debate which has seen prominent public figures call for the liberalisation of firearm legislation in order to give citizens the opportunity to protect their property. The fact that most property crimes are allegedly committed either by drug-addicts or low-status social groups such as the Roma appears to be an important factor in this debate. The contempt in which many Bulgarians hold these groups makes it easier to call for a more liberal arms regime as a response, with whatever consequences that may have. In August 2004, the leader of one of the largest trade unions in the country, Podkrepa, stated that high crime rates in Bulgaria are in large part due to organised crime groups aided by rich Roma individuals. Stating that the Roma integration has failed, he saw the only way to counter Roma crime as following the American model and allowing everyone to have a firearm at home.²⁰⁵

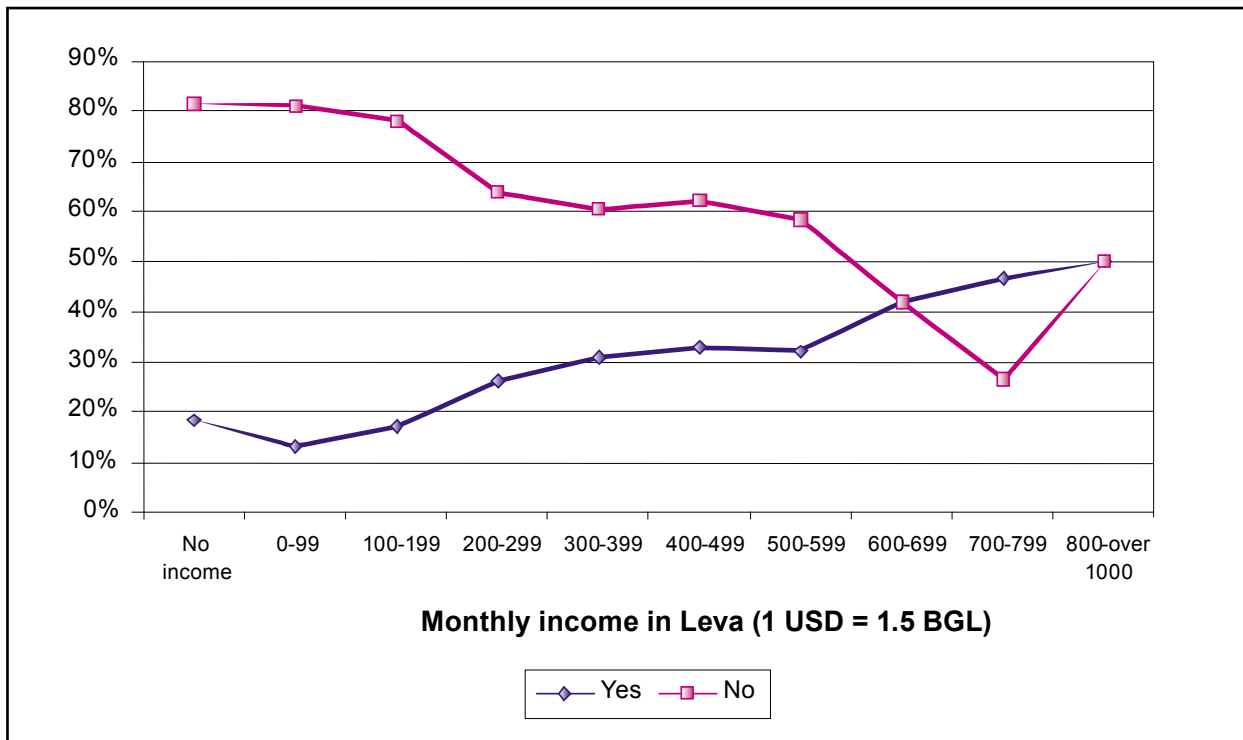


Figure 29: Income vs desire to acquire a weapon.

²⁰⁵ Novinar, 11 August 2004.

One comment serves to illustrate the feelings of this social group, “I am not some kind of coward, I’m a man with a family and a business to protect. If there are twenty Gypsies coming, I take out a Kalashnikov and that’s it” (I,6). This fantastic scenario is exaggerated, but variations on this theme were occasionally heard in discussions. As the HHS showed, the most ardent advocates of a more liberal domestic arms control regime are those who fear crime, or have been personally affected by it. Perhaps unsurprisingly the reaction of Roma focus group participants to this sort of remark is one of horror. As one participant protested, “you can’t kill someone for stealing a TV set!”

3.9 Attitude towards domestic SALW control

Two opposing views were evident among respondents in regard to domestic SALW control. One view that might be termed ‘liberal’, was that the small arms proliferation currently observed in Bulgaria demonstrates the difficulty, or impossibility, of domestic small arms control.

The **liberal** argument ran as follows. It is obvious that the state is failing to cope with violence, therefore it should allow the possibility for self-defence to those wishing to do so – people should be permitted to possess legally-held arms and to use them where necessary. If a person decides that he or she needs a weapon, it can always be found and if he or she is inclined to use it, sooner or later it will be used regardless of the legal restrictions on use. At best the law is an irrelevance, because the Bulgarian citizen is inventive enough to dodge any law, as the well-known practice of modifying gas-spray guns shows. At worst the current legal restrictions are just another way for the public administration to raise money. Pronouncements about public safety are a cover. The state wilfully complicates the procedure for acquiring weapons in order to raise money, both legally and through bribes. In this view it is not the type of weapons that matters, but how they are used. Instead of spending state time and funds on regulating weapons, the emphasis should be placed on dealing with criminals and on educating the public how to store, handle and carry weapons.

People of this persuasion were more likely to favour the formation of self-defence organisations.

Box 11: The Liberalisation argument – an extreme case

A small number of respondents who favoured liberalising Bulgaria’s domestic arms control regime also advocated a radical solution to crime:

“These remaining two years until our accession to the European Union should be used as a gratis period so that some of those who are most cheeky can be shot – that’s why the arms possession regime should be relaxed. Temperate terror... people must have arms...so that when one of those guys breaks into my house I can shoot him. If he breaks into your house you shoot him too. In this way, they would disappear in a few years.” (1-6)

The contrary view was that greater control should be exercised *precisely because* Bulgaria faces problems with small arms proliferation. Those who made the state control argument tended to make a connection between Bulgaria’s troubled political and economic transition and the proliferation of small arms. They characterised the transition period as anarchic, using phrases such as ‘we opened the bottle’. Since crime on the present scale was impossible under Communism they conclude that a strong government and a powerful state can handle the ‘chaos’. The solution therefore is for the state to marshal its forces and place strict limits on everything from firearms possession to the profiteering of private businesses. A majority of this group felt that military industry should be subject to similar controls. One group strongly in favour of tight domestic controls were young people in the bigger cities.

In recent years the question of domestic firearms control has become a matter of public debate and political interest in Bulgaria. Arguments for harsher penalties for illegal possession began to be heard on the back of several high-profile drug-related assassinations in which automatic or semi-automatic weapons were used. The General Secretary of the Mol, Boyko Borissov, has made the case for harsher penalties on several occasions. A second line of debate ensued after a well-known trade union leader, Konstantin Trenchev, called for relaxed gun controls as a way to fight petty crime and property thefts, crimes for which he largely blamed the Roma minority. Human rights and Roma NGOs responded by denouncing the proposal as inspired by racism.



The Bulgarian gun-rights debate has two distinctive camps. One side finds its inspiration in the USA, and the National Rifle Association's views on gun rights. It is supported by several non-governmental associations of gun owners, gun-store owners, and defence industry business associations (see sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3). Its opponents, who are in favour of tighter controls, do not have a strong civil society base, but benefit from the tacit support of the MoI, MoD and particularly the police, since most officers favour a society in which guns are the security services' prerogative. Based on the responses to questions about a number of different arms control measures, including restrictions on the possession and trade in weapons, HHS results point to tighter, rather than laxer controls on SALW as the majority choice of the public:

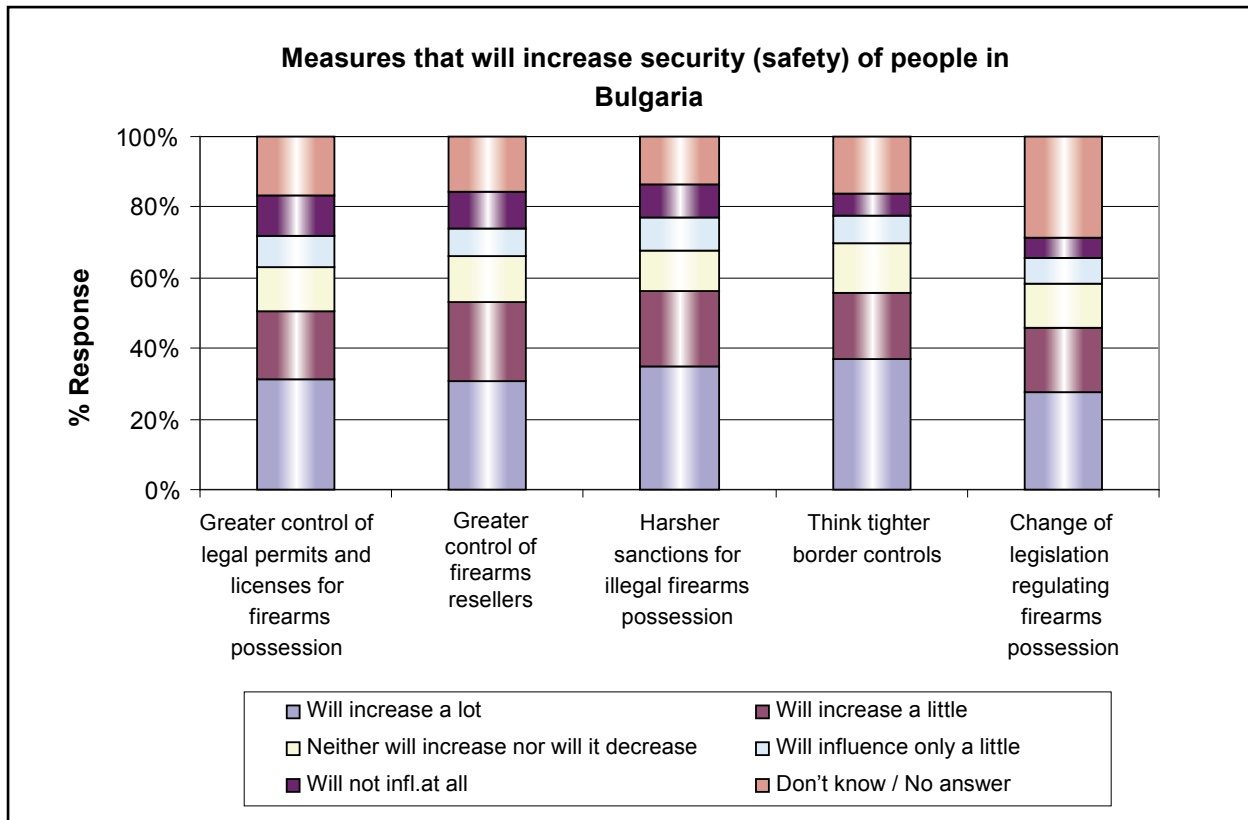


Figure 30: Measures that will increase security (safety) of people in Bulgaria (Base N = 1250)

3.10 Attitude towards controls on production and transfer

The typical range of attitudes displayed by FGD participants towards SALW production by Bulgaria was as follows:

- **Production should cease entirely:** Opportunities for military conversion should be better explored so as to eliminate arms production without raising unemployment. Since “it is not always possible to have markets for this stuff,” the state should concentrate its efforts on ensuring that equipment and labour is re-allocated efficiently (V,9,11).
- **The arms industry should be re-nationalised:** Privatising defence companies has primarily benefited foreign competitors or corrupt bosses. Conversion plans have never worked and Bulgaria's incredible expertise in the field remains valued around the world (I,6). When the state owned the arms industry, it “used to be the engine of the rest of production.” (IV,1).
- **A mixed sector with state oversight:** The right blend of market incentives and state ownership and control is needed. There should be no further reduction in legal production because that only encourages illegal production.



It is worth noting that whatever mix of freedom and control over SALW production participants favoured, they were unanimous in thinking that weapons will continue to be produced in Bulgaria, if not legally, then illegally.

FGD members were well aware that Bulgaria exports small arms. By far the dominant view among the public is that the arms export business is a lucrative one and therefore of great importance for the economy of a country whose budget is stretched. A popular view was that arms are mostly sold to ‘third world’ countries. Iraq, Iran, India and African and Latin American states were all named, as were Western countries, including the USA and UK. Participants were also aware of the existence of international arms export control agreements and of the UN embargo system in particular. Although their appreciation of the reasons for a particular destination being under embargo were sometimes confused, the basic norms that transfer control regimes embody seemed to be understood. At the same time, however, respondents would point out that “*this doesn't mean we are not selling*” (I,1). There was an assumption that sales can always be arranged, using “private companies and/or mediator countries” (I,4,8). However, for most participants, a desire to see the country's arms industry perform well was tempered by fairly well-developed ideas about the need to restrain arms transfers to take account of moral and legal factors. HHS questions on official SALW transfers also showed that most respondents want controls to be applied to exports.

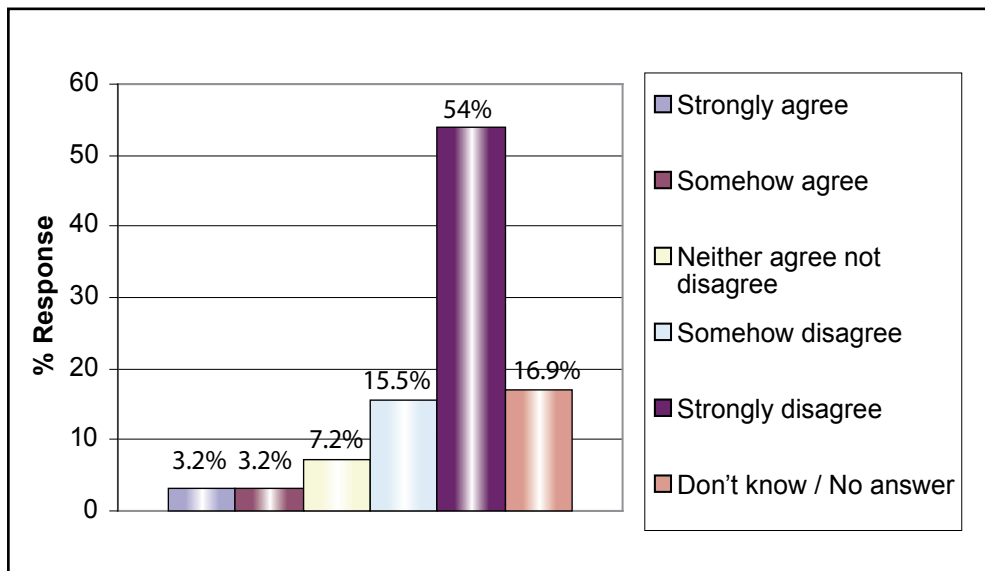


Figure 31: To what degree do you agree with the following statement, “The Bulgarian Government should export arms to any possible buyer irrespective of what they will be used for?” (Base N = 1250)

Further questioning shows that respondents had well-formed opinions about the sort of destinations that Bulgaria should, and should not, export to.

Yet 39.8 percent of respondents stated that they did not know whether the government's current efforts to apply controls in this area were adequate. This compares with only 10.8 percent who claim not to know how well the government is doing in combating organised crime, or 13.7 percent in the case of anti-drug trafficking campaigns. One possible interpretation of this figure is that most respondents are not interested in international arms transfers, as is generally the case with other questions of foreign policy. However, participants in FGDs tended to have well-formed opinions about arms transfers, and a good level of knowledge of well-publicised illegal cases. Bearing this in mind, an alternative explanation is plausible – that a good part of the 39.8 percent of respondents would in fact venture an opinion if the government was to make information about arms transfers publicly available.

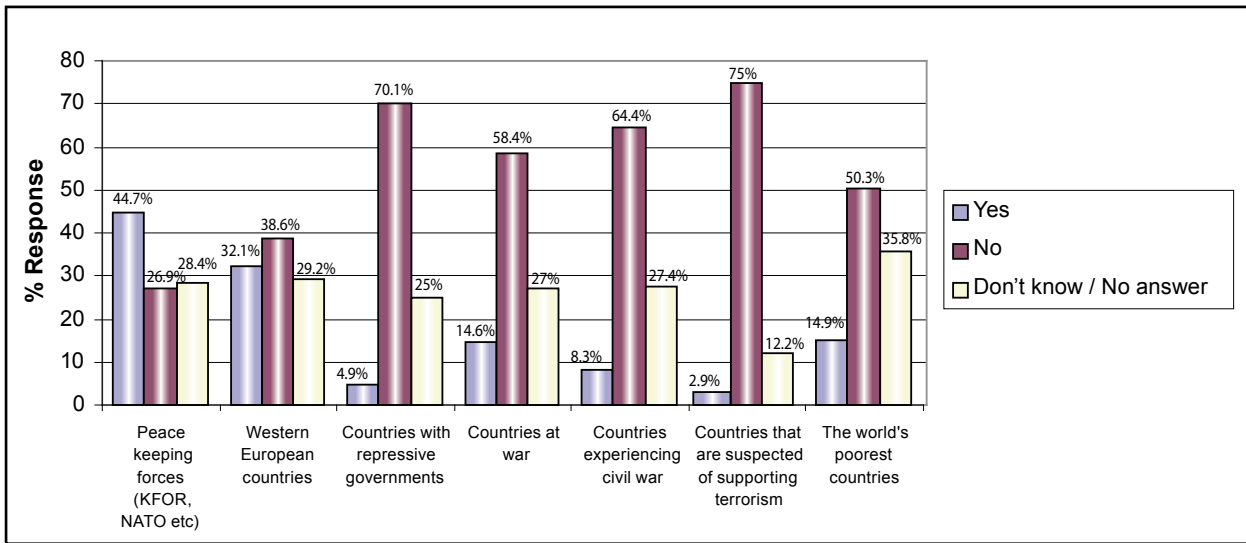


Figure 32: Do you approve of Bulgaria selling arms to any of the following? (Base N = 1250)

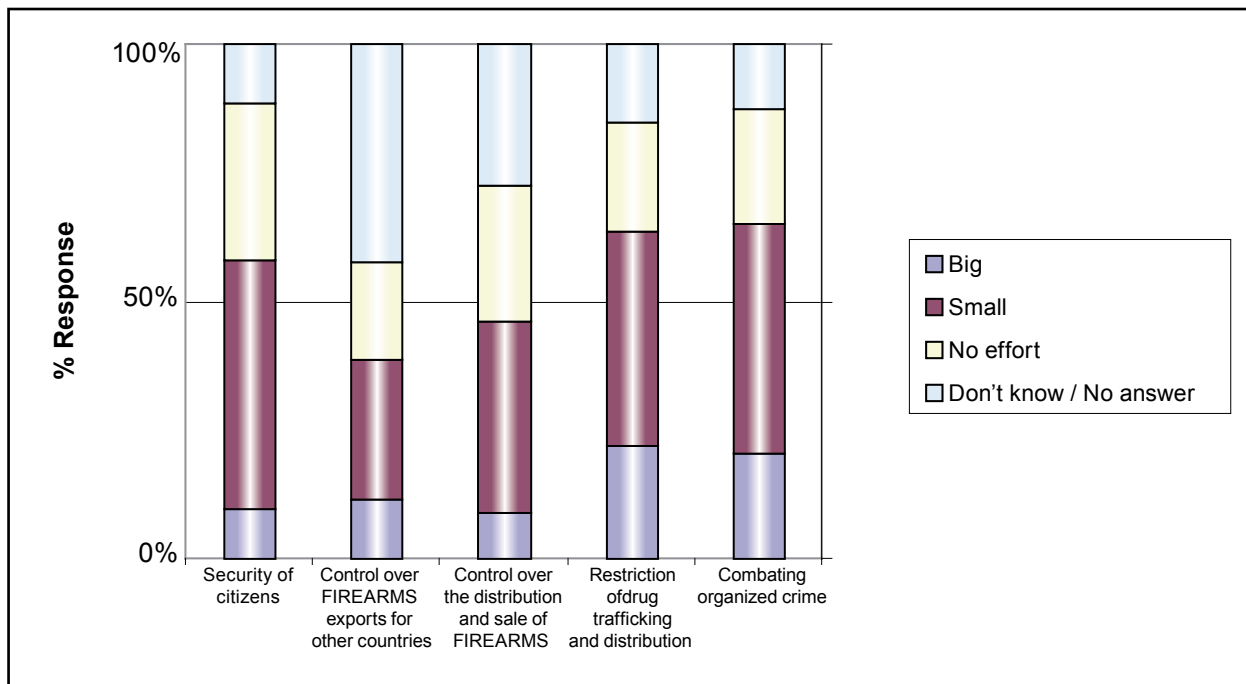


Figure 33: In your opinion, how much effort does the government apply in each of the following areas? (Base N = 1250)

Negative attitudes to exports are in most cases related to people's general (negative) attitude towards arms (I,2,3; V,1,8; VI,6,8):

- It is inhumane and immoral to sell arms.
- It is hard to control the ultimate use of exported weapons which may one day turn against you (V,1,6; VI,6,8).
- The benefits from such a trade will always go to select individuals, not the common man (III,8).



“There are only disadvantages, no advantages. Pensions dropped, and salaries too – everything. All this used to go to the budget.” (II,5)

“The volume of arms exports before could easily cover [Bulgaria’s] external debts.” (II,2).

- Focus group respondents who perceive a connection between reduced social spending and the contraction of the arms industry.

Positive attitudes towards arms exports appeared to be connected to perceptions of arms as having protective/preventative qualities, eg it was generally accepted that there is no problem with exports to the armed forces of other countries.

There was a widespread attitude that countries ‘prone to violence’ are not acceptable trading partners, and that there should be strict controls on transfers to countries that: support terrorism (V; VI); are ruled by dictatorships (V; VI); or are undergoing armed conflict (IV; V; VI). Some indignation was shown at the fact that infamous illegal exports such as the TEREM or ‘Albanian deal’ cases (I,4; II,2,5,7) have not resulted in any serious prosecutions.

Another common opinion was that it is somehow unreasonable or abnormal to have strict controls over SALW inside the country while exporting weapons to other countries. “What if the people in those other countries choose to reason in the same way and decide to restrict usage of arms in their countries, but to export them here?” (V,6). The group that most often expressed this view was younger people in larger towns. Their reasoning was moral rather than commercial or political. Young people were also the most likely to counter the argument that ‘if Bulgaria doesn’t export them, somebody else will’, by emphasising the country’s responsibilities: “the point is that it would not be our country...no need to always think about the others, of third or fourth parties, etc...they can sell each other whatever they want, it is up to them. The essential thing here is that we don’t sell.” (V,9). Women were also far less likely to support the sale of weapons to repressive governments or to countries experiencing war and civil war, with females constituting only a third of respondents supporting these exports.

For the older generation, however, particularly elderly rural males and ex-military personnel, the pride of place that Bulgaria used to hold in the world’s arms markets is cherished more fondly. There was a perception among this group that during the years of restructuring and privatisation, state officials abdicated their responsibilities to the country by surrendering the markets that had been so painstakingly built-up over decades. Quite unrealistic figures were sometimes cited by these respondents when they gave estimates for the contribution that the once-healthy defence industry made to state revenue (by one estimate the military-industrial complex earned Bulgaria \$1bn in 1995).²⁰⁶ Governments, past and present, were criticised by this group for allowing industry to be downsized. Participants often disagreed on whether government officials were guilty only of caving in to Western pressure, or of benefiting personally, though the explanation that the officials who took these decisions were somehow involved in the arms business and stood to gain from privatisation was actually the more common one. Among this constituency there was great resistance to the idea that legitimate forces such as better competition or necessary restructuring had brought this pressure to bear on Bulgarian industry. This constituency was also more likely to dismiss the idea of arms embargoes as ‘imposed from the outside’.

The range of justifications offered by middle-aged and older men, particularly with military backgrounds, for an unrestricted arms trade are instructive:

- There is no place for ethics in business, “ethics are for the church” (I,6,8).
- If Bulgaria stops exporting, others will continue.
- Ending sales to conflict zones won’t stop the conflict: “who can say what’s the truth for Macedonia, after all, it’s their business” (II,2, 5,7).
- Countries with conflicts are the natural markets for arms producers – rich countries are peaceful, “their armies are fully equipped” (III,7; V,3).
- States have a right to purchase arms regardless of the type of political system they enjoy.

²⁰⁶ BTV, 21 October 2003.



- It is naïve to think that arms shipments can be controlled from the point of departure to arrival – transactions are complex and recipients will re-sell, so why delude oneself that controls are possible? (I,4,8).
- One man's terrorist (or dictator) is another man's freedom fighter (II,2; IV): "The UN list of terrorist states includes five countries, whereas the USA list twenty-eight."
- Major arms producing companies are powerful enough to deliberately provoke unrest or conflicts so as to enlarge their markets, so controls are pointless.
- Professions of humanity and moral conduct in the arms trade are themselves used as a business tool (I,4,5,8; II,2,3,5,7; III,7; V,6,7; VI).

3.11 Attitude towards SALW destruction

Most respondents were divided as to whether the destruction of surplus weapons was a futile or ridiculous idea. All were convinced that Bulgaria has huge stocks of arms and ammunition – "we have enough stored weapons to arm five armies or more...the army keeps it, they don't have a market." (IV,5) – but most seemed either unable or unwilling to envisage the destruction of such vast amounts. From this, one can conclude that the public are not well informed about the ongoing efforts by Bulgaria to destroy surplus SALW, though the public's general lack of trust in government institutions and experience of poor SALW management in recent years may also explain scepticism about SALW destruction. Although former military/arms industry personnel were more likely to understand that unsafe ammunition requires destruction, they held that "there is no such procedure for arms, they are simply subject to regular prophylactic technical inspections" (IV,1,4).

3.12 Attitude towards SALW collection

Most respondents were equally sceptical when questioned about the feasibility of voluntary weapons collection. The range of objections raised was as follows:

- No objective assessment can be made of the required level of weapons possession: "If one has two guns, does it mean that one is excess? This is silly! Of course one would be needed at home and the other at the country house."
- Voluntary collections are no substitute for anti-crime measures – "Criminals should be collected, not arms!"
- Levels of weapons possession will not drop until the state and its security providers function better.
- Previous attempts at mass weapons collection and seizure have failed and will do so again: "It would fail as it did on September 9th,²⁰⁷ (II,3); "Weapons were just hidden, the same would happen today." (IV,1,8).
- Collections in other Balkans countries (Albania was most commonly cited), have failed to return significant numbers of weapons. "People kept enough for themselves to wage a mini-war" (I,4).
- The patterns of supply and demand for weapons are constant, so that arms will be re-imported to replace those that are collected (I,7).

Because of the level of scepticism among FGD participants, no one form of collection scheme, or incentive structure, could be clearly identified as suitable for use in a future SALW collection:

²⁰⁷ A reference to the date on which the Communist Party came to power in 1944. In 1946 the new government instituted a weapons collection scheme designed to retrieve weapons in the possession of former combatants. It was thought to be only a partial success.



	VERY LIKELY	LIKELY	UNLIKELY	VERY UNLIKELY	DON'T KNOW / NO ANSWER
Harsher sanctions for illegal firearms	7.8	23.5	26.0	22.7	20.1
Crime is reduced	5.1	19.3	27.7	24.3	23.6
The police are more effective	11.1	27.9	22.5	15.9	22.6
The economic situation improves	6.6	19.6	24.0	21.6	28.2
Immunity from prosecution offered in return	6.0	22.1	22.4	23.3	26.2
Agreement is to be made with local authority	5.8	18.0	22.2	21.5	32.4
Social development programme	3.0	9.9	21.0	27.4	38.7
Lottery offering prizes	7.9	15.4	21.2	30.8	24.7
Amount of cash is offered	8.9	21.9	21.4	25.2	22.6

Table 29: In your opinion, how likely is it that people illegally owning firearms will turn them in if... (Base N = 1250)

Part of the background to this scepticism is undoubtedly the endemic distrust in institutions among the public, which affects confidence in any state initiative. FGD participants even tended to view the idea of a cash buy-back of weapons as somewhat ridiculous, suggesting either that the price for weapons would be set too low, or that no incentive at all would inspire enough trust in such a process or in the collection agents. They suggested that most Bulgarians would suspect whoever ran such a scheme of having hidden motives and would fear fraud, betrayal or prosecution. "People have no trust in anybody...least of all a guy coming to the door to ask what I have" (III,9). As the graph below shows, the public would place trust in very few organisations to conduct a weapons collection, among them international organisations and NGOs. Nevertheless when asked to identify the actors that people would be most likely to trust in the event of a weapons collection, the police were rated as the most popular institution by far:

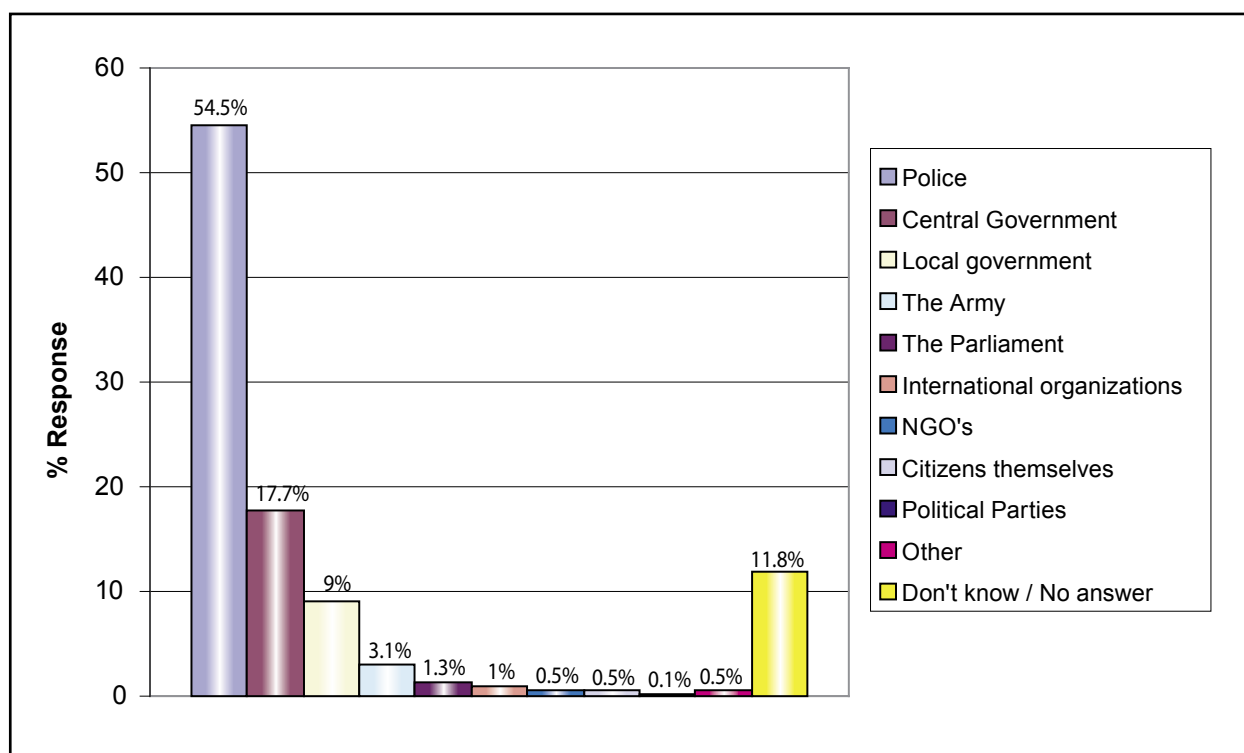


Figure 34: If a voluntary firearms collection was begun in your community, who do you think should be responsible for the collection of firearms? (Base N = 1250)



However some social and geographic groups were more supportive of the idea of weapons collection than others. Of all the focus group members, those in Sofia were more inclined to think a weapons collection feasible, provided it was accompanied by a large-scale awareness campaign run by trustworthy persons. In other groups it was apparent that women, young people and ethnic minorities (especially Roma) tended to favour tighter controls on possession more than other respondents. In several cases these respondents raised the idea of weapons collection and seizure as a precursor to a ban on all civilian possession, except hunting and sports weapons. This group did not see a restrictive regime as realistic in the near future though, because of a perceived acquiescence by both society and the state in the face of growing SALW proliferation, and because they did not consider agencies that would need to implement any new controls as being at all reliable.

“If nobody had arms I wouldn’t want to have one either.” (III,8).

“Who would convince me that if I handed in my gun, my neighbour would also hand in his? Nobody could convince me of that.” (III,10,11).

As noted above, ethnic Turks and Roma who participated in discussions were more likely to state a preference for total civilian disarmament. Their support for such measures was tempered by a concern that disarmament should be cross-community – they would be willing to hand in any weapons only on condition that others did too. Ethnic Turks who participated in FGDs had not forgotten the disarmament campaign that the Communist government forced upon their community during the so-called ‘Renaissance Process’ in the late 1980s. They remember the confiscations of legal as well as illegal weapons during house-to-house raids. Consequently there was clearly some concern that a future disarmament campaign might target them unfairly (III,6,11). The coercive measures used in parts of the Former Yugoslavia were also remembered well. Roma respondents also appeared to view a society without civilian small arms possession as desirable, but insisted such a thing could only be achieved by means of house-to-house searches. They identified the public destruction of weapons as an important confidence-building measure.

Despite pockets of support, the attitude towards weapons collection was sceptical. Apart from respondents who favoured a very liberal domestic arms control regime, it was felt that more systematic controls rather than amnesties was the answer – “stricter control at a higher level” (I,10; II,7; III,11). The suggested measures included targeting the black market, and carrying out periodic checks on those with weapons permits (II,1; II,7, 10). It should also be noted that by far the most supportive constituency for SALW control interventions in general were the young and highly-educated respondents surveyed. Their support for tighter domestic controls also extends to tighter controls over production and export.