

Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation

Research

***TOP LINE REPORT**

Americans' Attitudes Towards Legal, Regulated Fishing, Target/Sport Shooting, Hunting and Trapping



Study conducted for
Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation by:



PLEASE NOTE:

THIS IS A TOP LINE REPORT
CONSISTING ONLY OF HIGH-
LEVEL DATA.

A FULL REPORT (114 PAGES)
IS POSTED TO
WWW.OUTDOORSTEWARDS.ORG
AND INCLUDES ADDITIONAL
DETAILS ON REGIONAL
REPONSES, RESPONDENT
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION,
AND SURVEY METHODOLOGY.

Americans' Attitudes Towards Legal, Regulated Fishing, Target/Sport Shooting, Hunting, and Trapping

June 2023

Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation



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INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted by Responsive Management and the Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation, Inc., to measure Americans' attitudes toward legal, regulated fishing, sport shooting, hunting, and trapping. Responsive Management has tracked public attitudes on the four activities in various forms since 1995, and the study makes use of this trend data by examining how Americans' attitudes have changed over the years.¹ The study also examines how approval of fishing, hunting, and trapping varies by motivation, species, and method. Identifying the trends in these attitudes is important for developing, managing, and assessing recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3) programs for these activities in the continually changing social and political climates of the U.S. The purpose of this study is to proactively track these trends and to accurately update our understanding of Americans' current attitudes and how they impact R3 efforts.

This study entailed a scientific, probability-based multi-modal survey of U.S. residents aged 18 and older. Data from the survey were weighted to ensure that the results were representative of adult Americans as a whole. **Many graphs within this report reference percentage increases or decreases. It is important to know that each 1.0% of change represents 2,532,726 adult Americans (aged 18 and older).**

In the survey, the four activities are referred to as follows: "legal hunting," "legal recreational fishing," "legal recreational shooting," and "regulated trapping." The qualifying terms before each activity serve to exclude any illegal or improper variations of the activity, as might be the case if a respondent were to interpret the single term "hunting" as being inclusive of poaching.

The project was funded by a Multistate Conservation Grant, a program funded from the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, and jointly managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA). Previous similar trend surveys have been funded by a variety of partners and grants, including through the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Multistate Conservation Grant Program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Hunters' Leadership Forum, the Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Other sources for the data used in the fishing, hunting, and trapping trend analysis include survey research for the Professional Outdoor Media Association and surveys conducted by Responsive Management for the Archery Trade Association; additionally, the trend analysis on shooting uses data from a survey by Roper Starch Worldwide. Sample sizes for these surveys range from 800 to 5,103, with sampling errors ranging from plus or minus 1.4 to 3.5 percentage points. All telephone surveys administered since 2006 entailed landlines and cell phones called in their proper state and regional proportions.

¹ For the trend results in this report, comparisons of the new data are made only to previous survey questions that used consistent wording.

APPROVAL OF LEGAL FISHING, SHOOTING, HUNTING, AND TRAPPING

Of the four activities, approval is highest for legal recreational fishing (90% of Americans approve) (Figure 4 and Table 1). Just a little lower are both approval of legal recreational shooting (78%) and legal hunting (77%). At the bottom is regulated trapping, of which 54% approve.

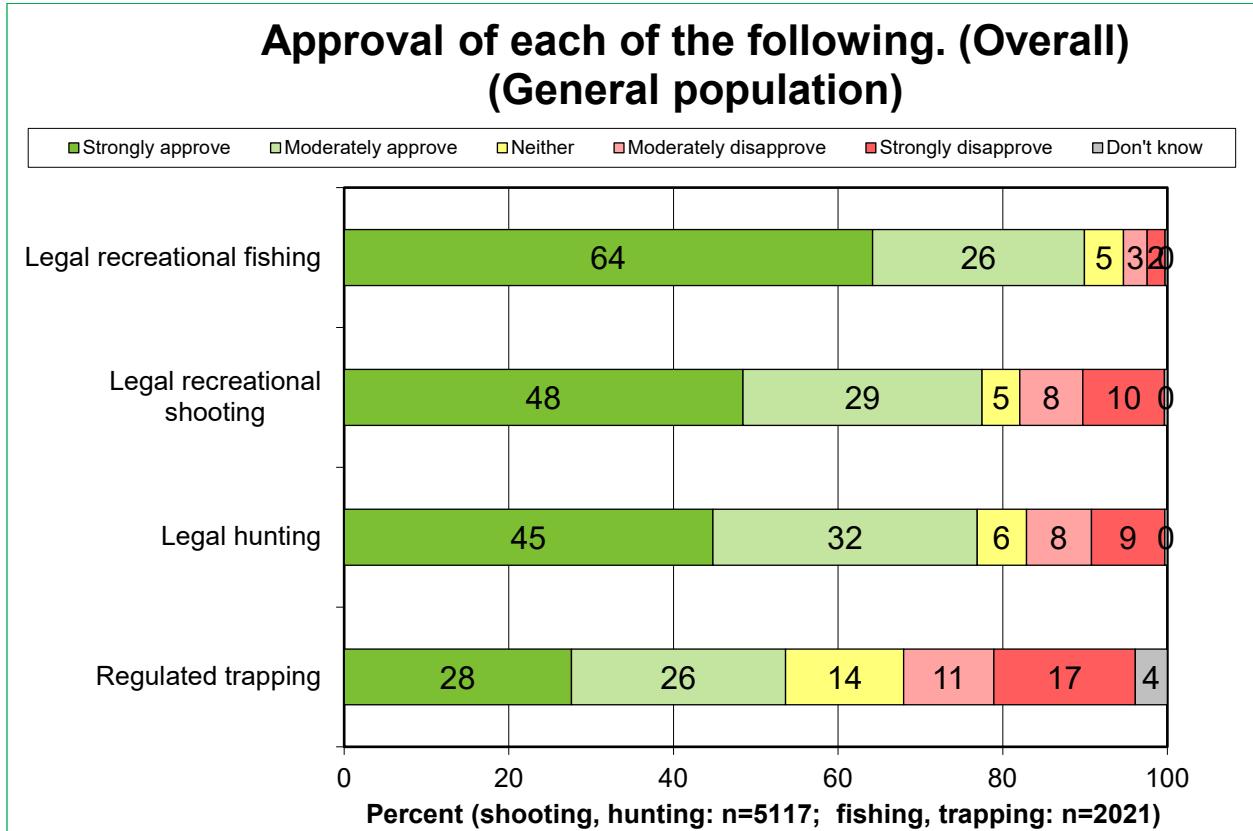


Figure 4. Approval and Disapproval of Fishing, Sport Shooting, Hunting, and Trapping

U.S. residents overall (percentage who approve / disapprove)	Legal recreational fishing	Legal recreational shooting	Legal hunting	Regulated trapping
Total approve	90	78	77	54
Total disapprove	5	18	17	28

Percentage who approve / disapprove		Legal recreational fishing	Legal recreational shooting	Legal hunting	Regulated trapping
Northeast Region	Total approve	87	73	75	52
	Total disapprove	6	22	19	30
South Region	Total approve	90	77	78	54
	Total disapprove	6	18	16	29
Midwest Region	Total approve	93	82	80	57
	Total disapprove	2	15	13	21
West Region	Total approve	90	77	74	50
	Total disapprove	5	17	20	31

Trends graphs are presented in Figures 9 through 12 of approval of fishing, shooting, hunting, and trapping. The graphs show, compared to recent years, a decline in approval of fishing, shooting, and hunting (as well as an increase in disapproval). Regarding trapping, overall approval is about the same in the three surveys shown in the graph. Disapproval has declined slightly, but respondents moved to neither, for the most part, rather than approval.

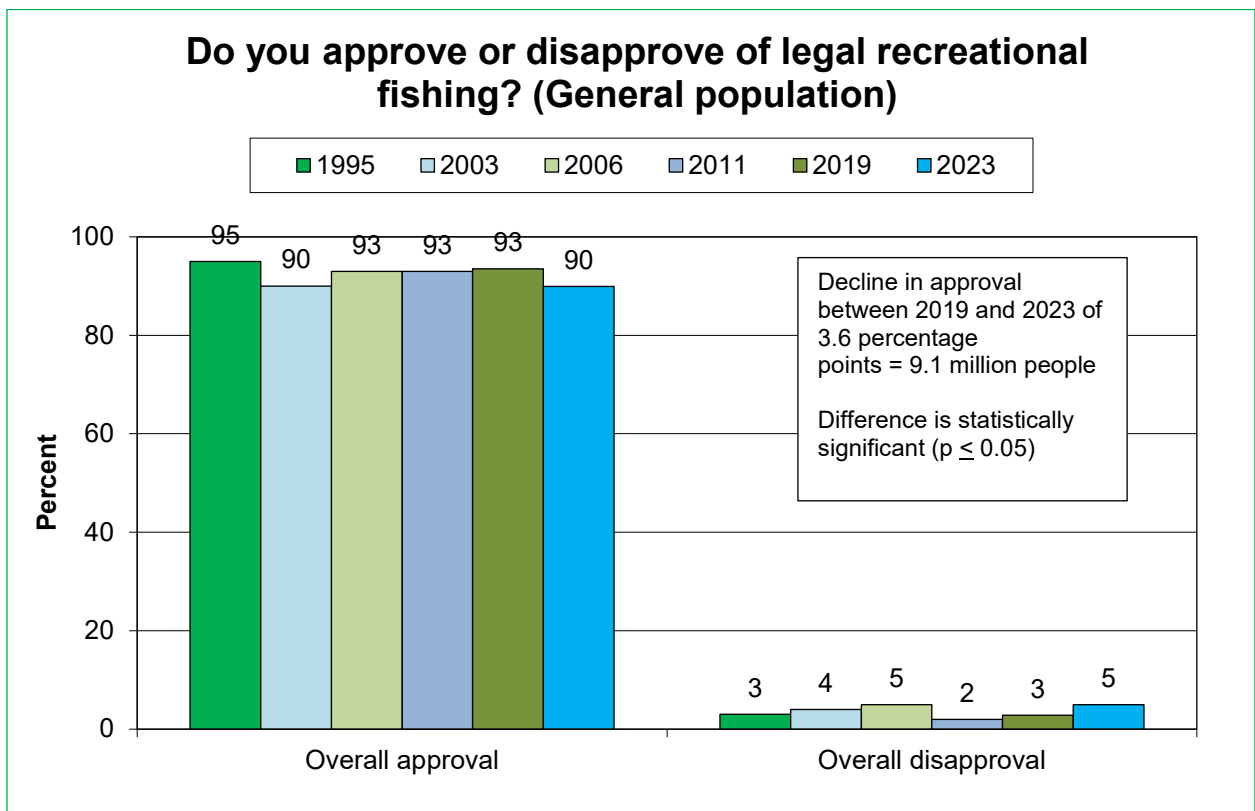


Figure 9. Approval and Disapproval of Recreational Fishing (Trends)

* Over 18 population of the U.S. is 253,272,570, which was used in all these calculations.

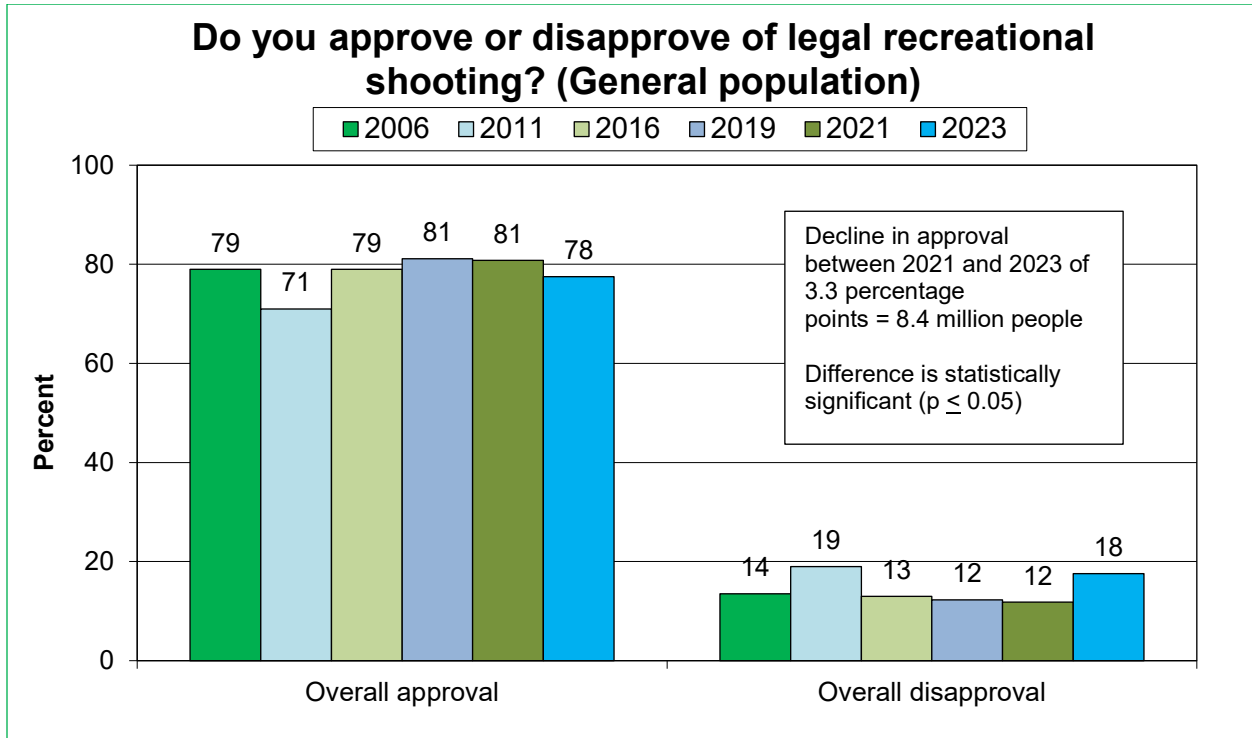


Figure 10. Approval and Disapproval of Recreational Shooting (Trends)

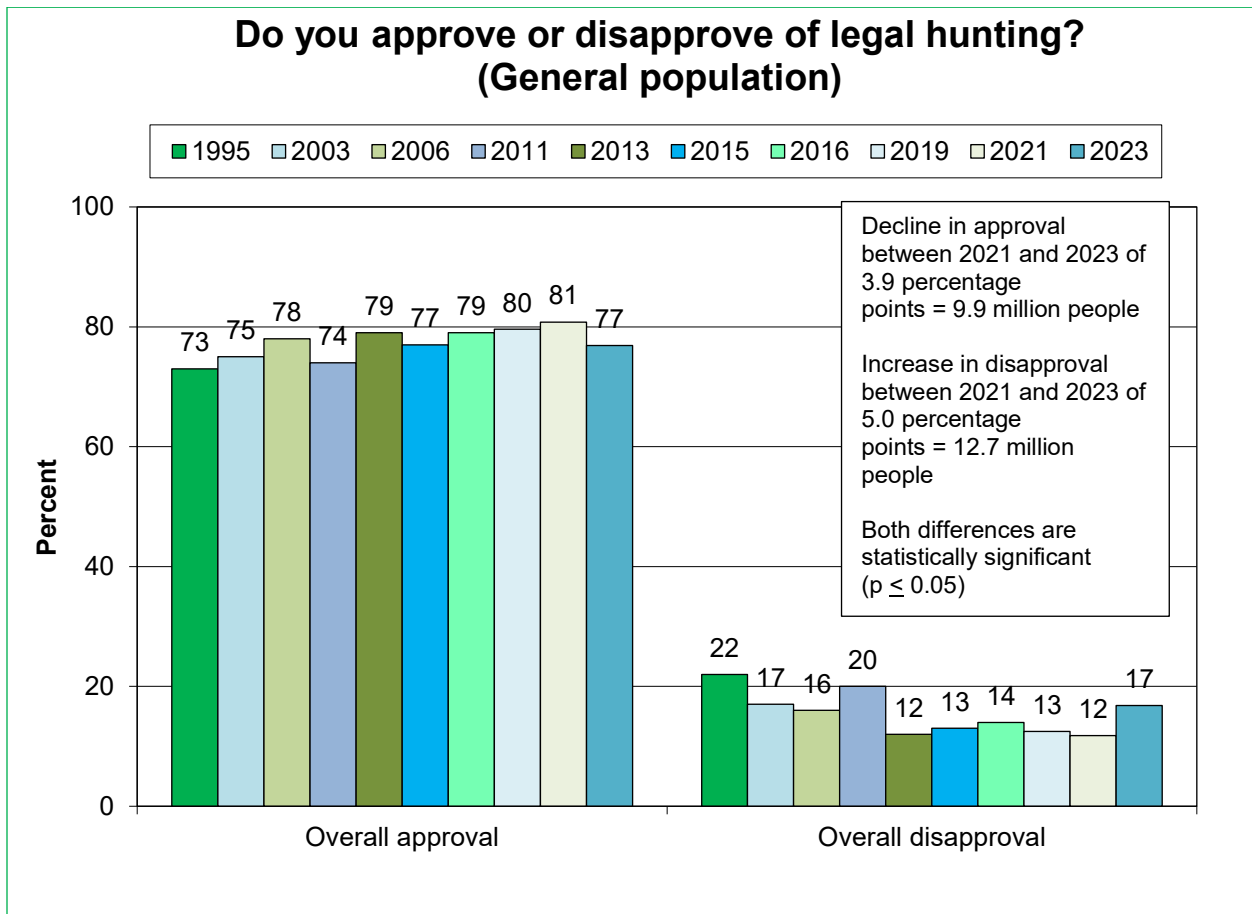


Figure 11. Approval and Disapproval of Hunting (Trends)

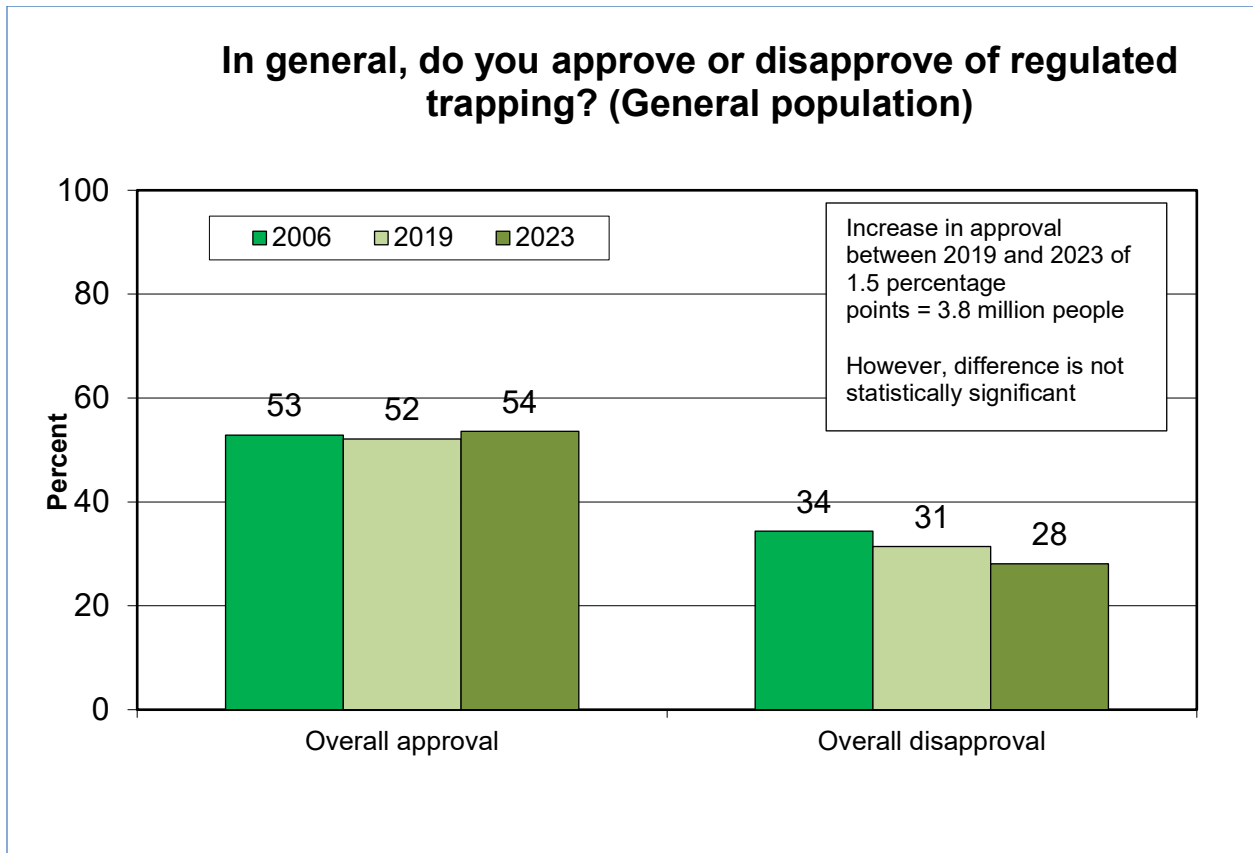


Figure 12. Approval and Disapproval of Trapping (Trends)

U.S. residents were then asked, regardless of their opinion on hunting, whether they agreed or disagreed that it is okay for other people to hunt. The large majority (86%) agreed that others can hunt in accordance with laws and regulations (Figure 24). Only 9% disagreed. (Recall that 77% of U.S. residents approve of legal hunting, so this percentage agreeing is substantially higher than approval of hunting itself.)

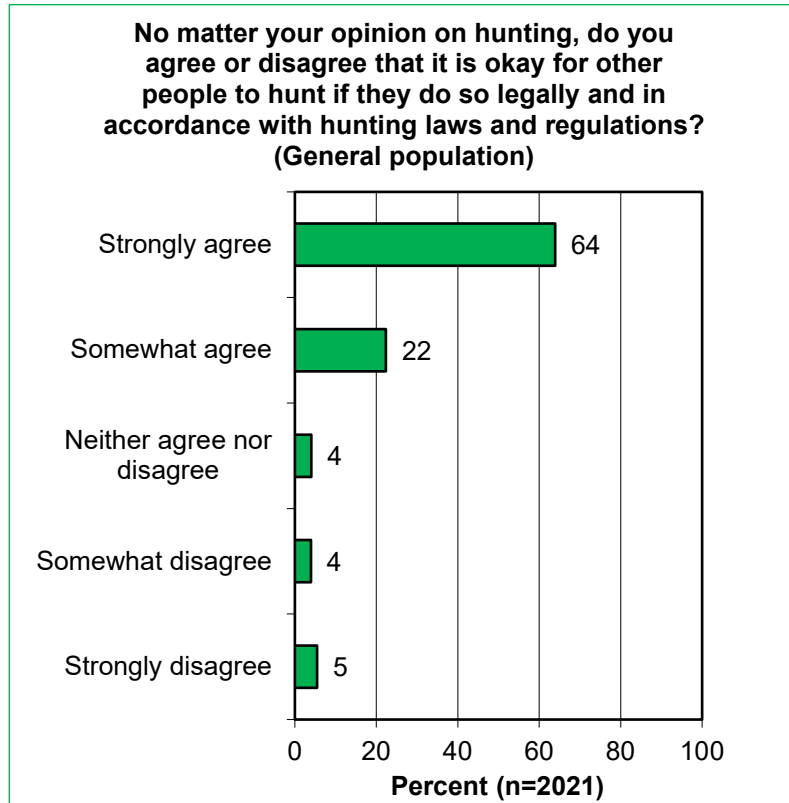


Figure 24. Opinion on Other People Hunting

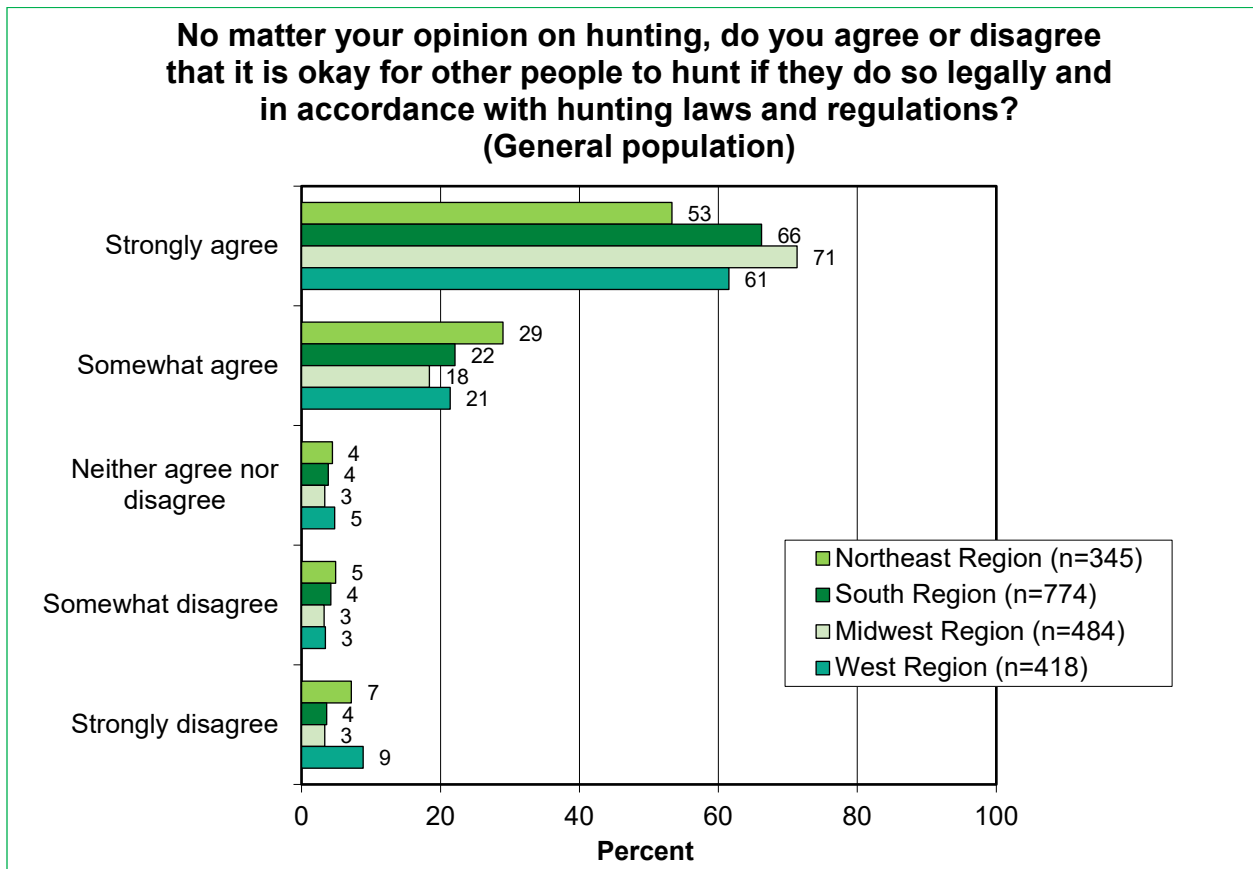


Figure 25. Opinion on Other People Hunting (Regions)

Figure 26 shows that agreement on this question has declined slightly since 2011.

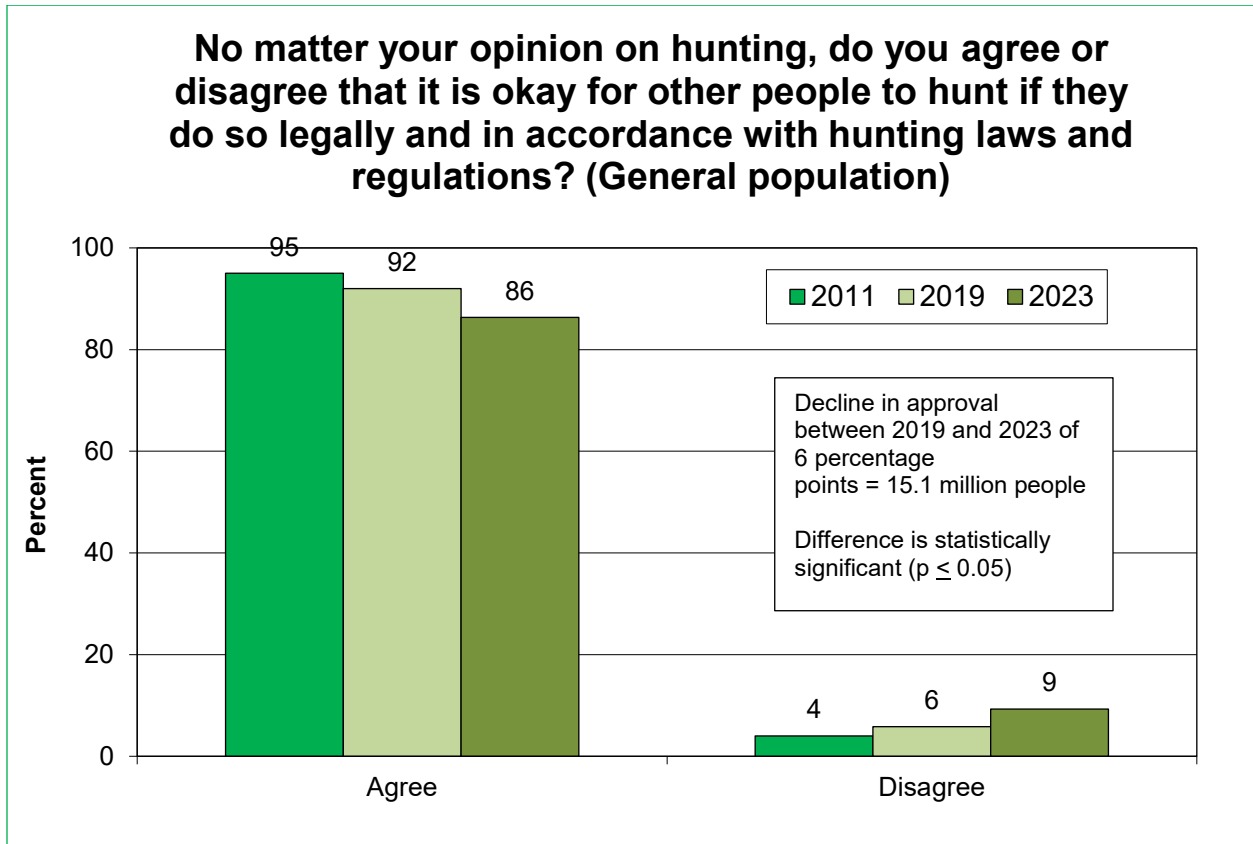
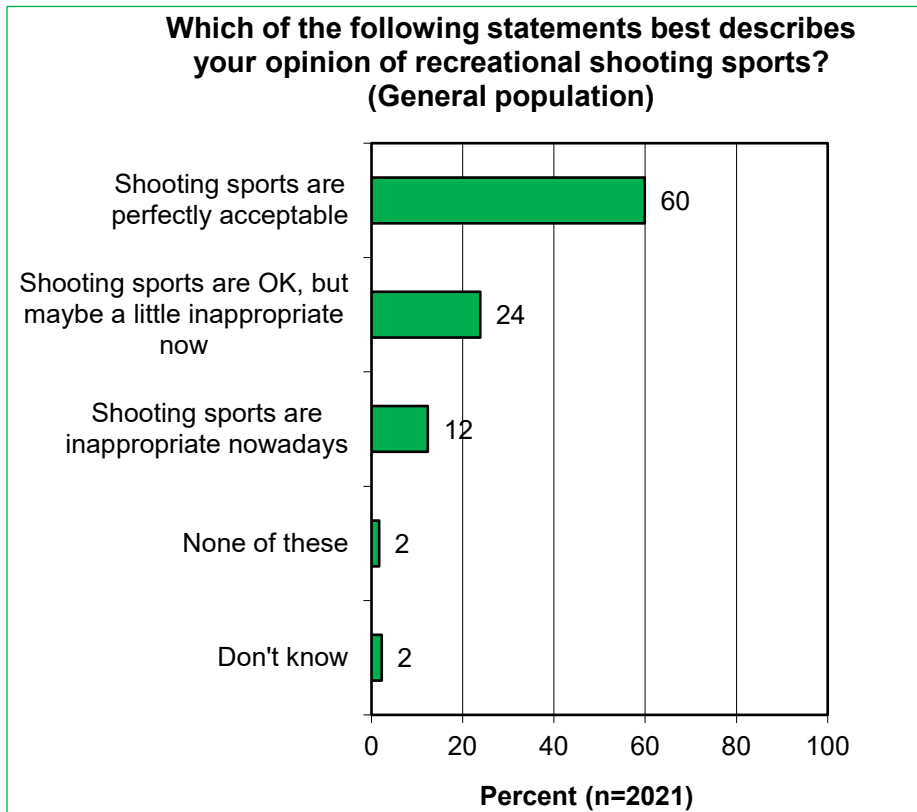


Figure 26. Opinion on Other People Hunting (Trends)



The large majority of Americans (60%) say that shooting sports are acceptable (Figure 30). On the other hand, 36% have doubts about the appropriateness of recreational shooting sports. Regionally, the highest acceptance is in the Midwest (64% find it acceptable, while 32% have doubts), while the lowest acceptance is in the Northeast (55% find it acceptable, with 41% having doubts) (Figure 31).

Figure 30. Opinion on Recreational Shooting Sports

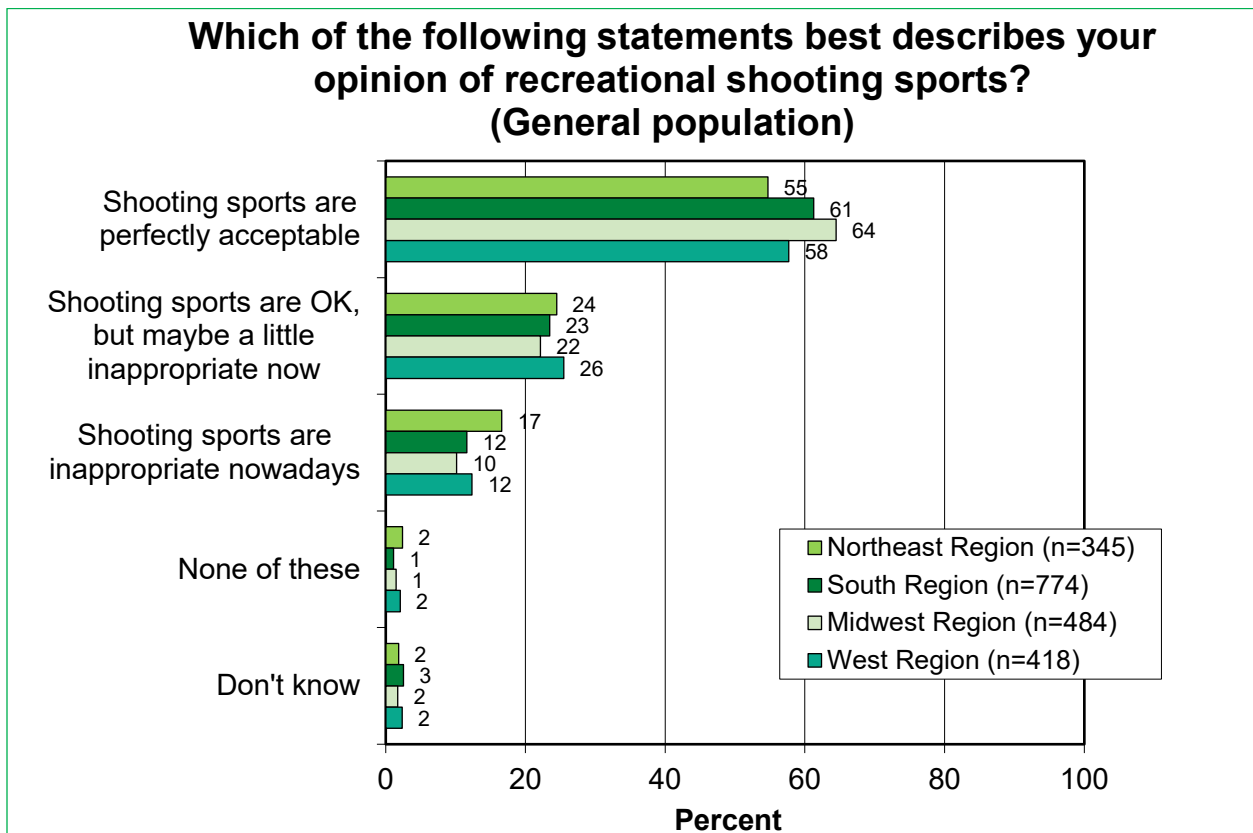


Figure 31. Opinion on Recreational Shooting Sports (Regions)

The acceptability of recreational shooting sports declined in 2023 compared to the previous two surveys in 2011 and 2019 (Figure 32).

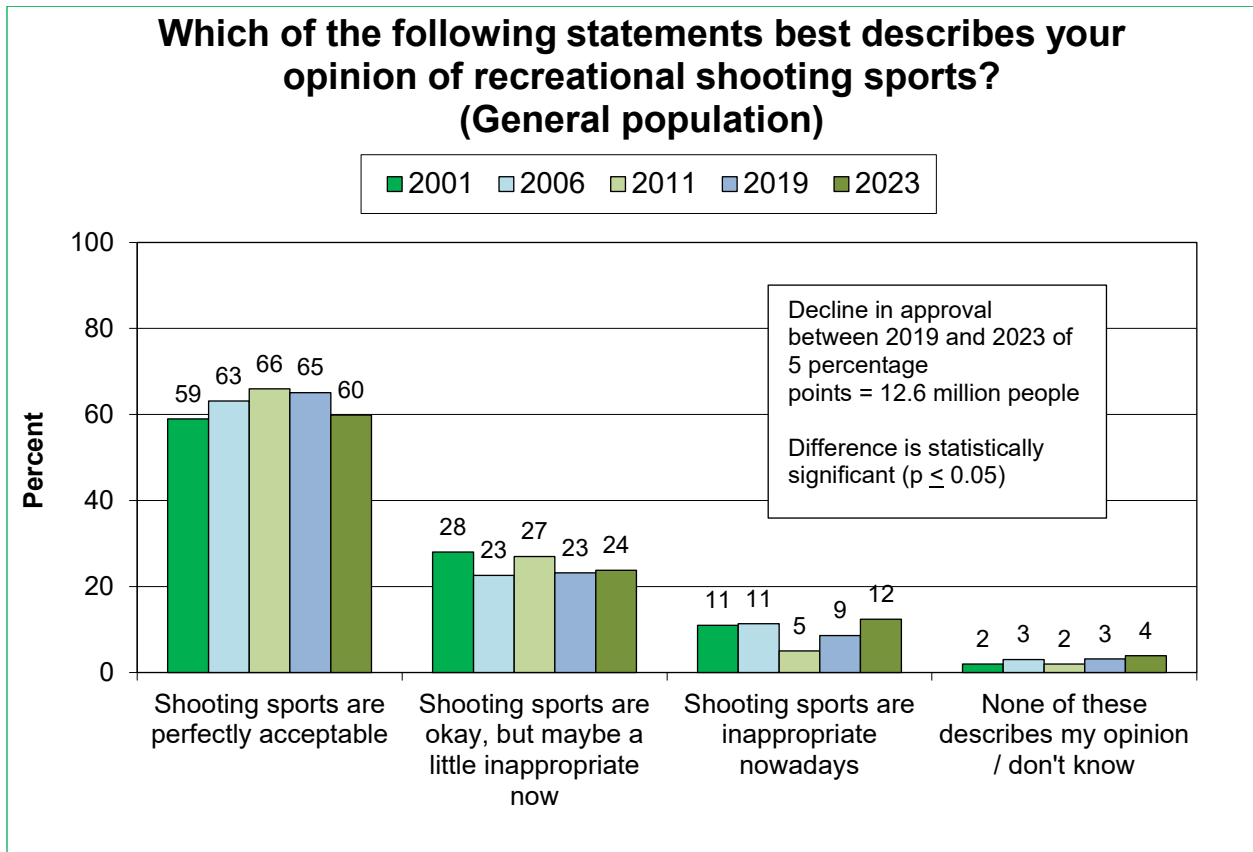


Figure 32. Opinion on Recreational Shooting Sports (Trends)

APPROVAL OF LEGAL HUNTING FOR VARIOUS REASONS, FOR VARIOUS SPECIES, AND USING VARIOUS METHODS

Four reasons are deemed the most acceptable for legal hunting, with two being human-centered and two being ecological (Figure 36 and Table 3). Regarding the first, to protect humans and for the meat are the top human-centered reasons, and for conservation and for wildlife management are the top ecological reasons. (Note that the survey asked about conservation in two ways: *for conservation of healthy wildlife populations* and *for conservation of wildlife populations*. Although not greatly different, a slightly higher percentage strongly approve with the *healthy* wording.)

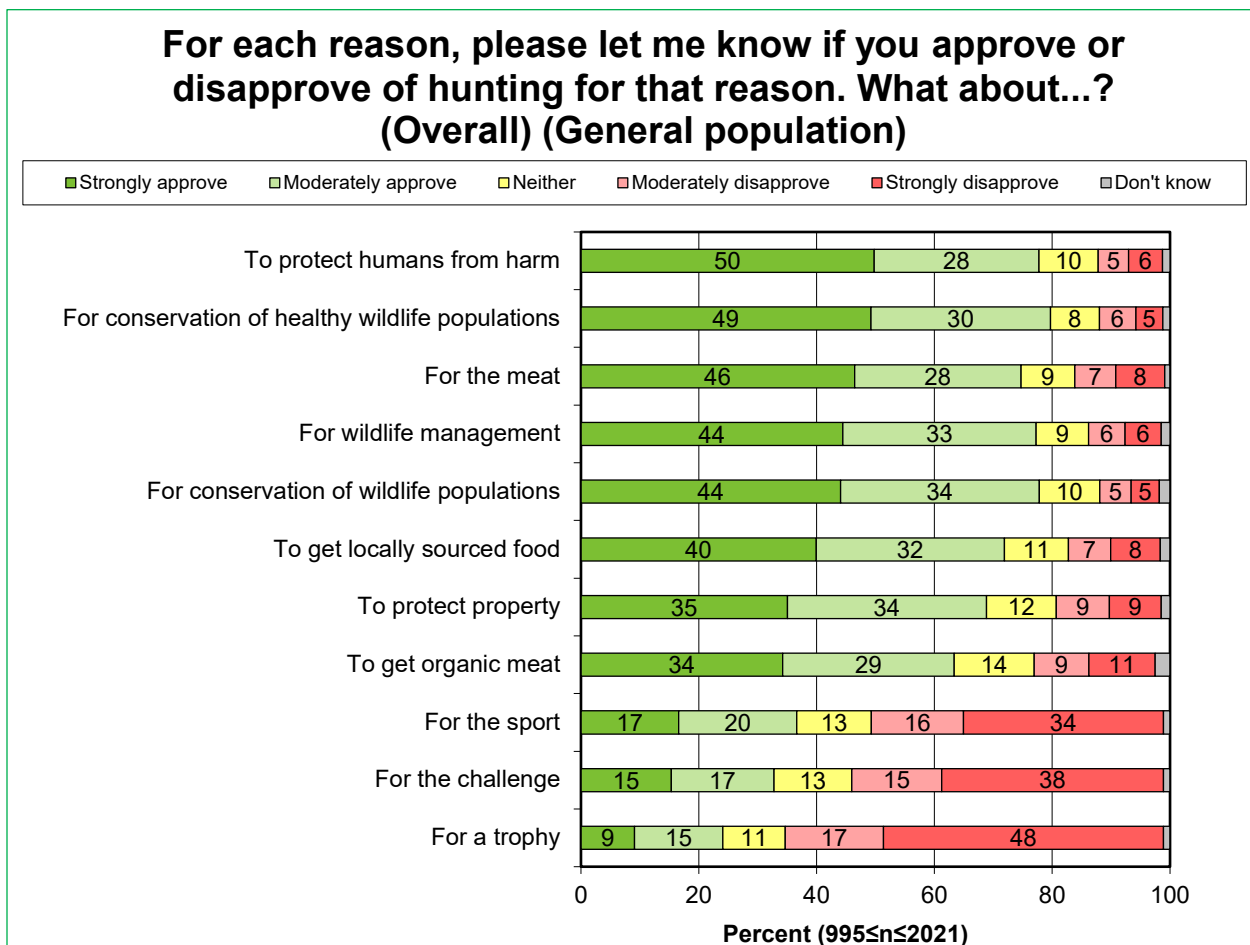


Figure 36. Approval and Disapproval of Hunting for Various Reasons

Table 3. Approval and Disapproval of Hunting for Various Reasons											
U.S. residents overall (percentage who approve / disapprove)	To protect humans from harm	For conservation of healthy wildlife populations	For the meat	For wildlife management	For conservation of wildlife populations	To get locally sourced food	To protect property	To get organic meat	For the sport	For the challenge	For a trophy
Total approve	78	80	75	77	78	72	69	63	37	33	24
Total disapprove	11	11	15	12	10	16	18	21	50	53	64

Trends analysis in Figure 41 revealed that reasons for hunting have lost support across the board, including traditionally strong approval reasons such as hunting for the meat (down 9.5% or 24.1 million people [statistically significant, $p < 0.05$]), hunting to protect people from harm (down 6.9% or 17.5 million people [statistically significant, $p \leq 0.05$]), and hunting for to get locally sourced food (down 10.9% or 27.6 million people [statistically significant, $p \leq 0.05$]). For most of the motivations, 2023 showed the lowest approval of all the survey years presented in the graph.

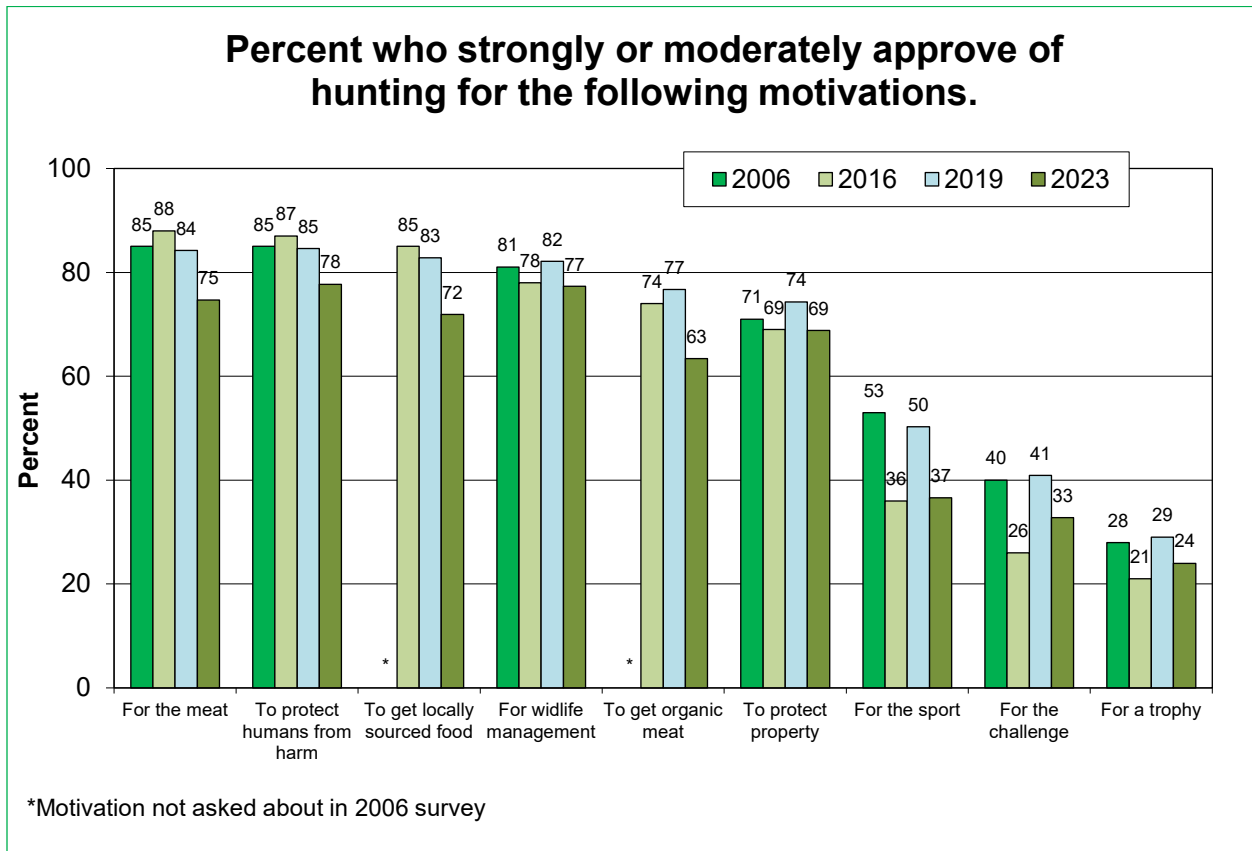


Figure 41. Approval and Disapproval of Hunting for Various Reasons (Trends)

The survey looked at hunting various species, as shown in Figure 43. The highest approval rate is for the hunting of deer and wild turkey: 69% of U.S. residents approve of hunting these species (summed on unrounded numbers). In a second tier are five commonly hunted species, all with approval rates of 55% up to 63%. For the rest of the species, disapproval exceeds approval. Table 5 shows the overall approval and disapproval.

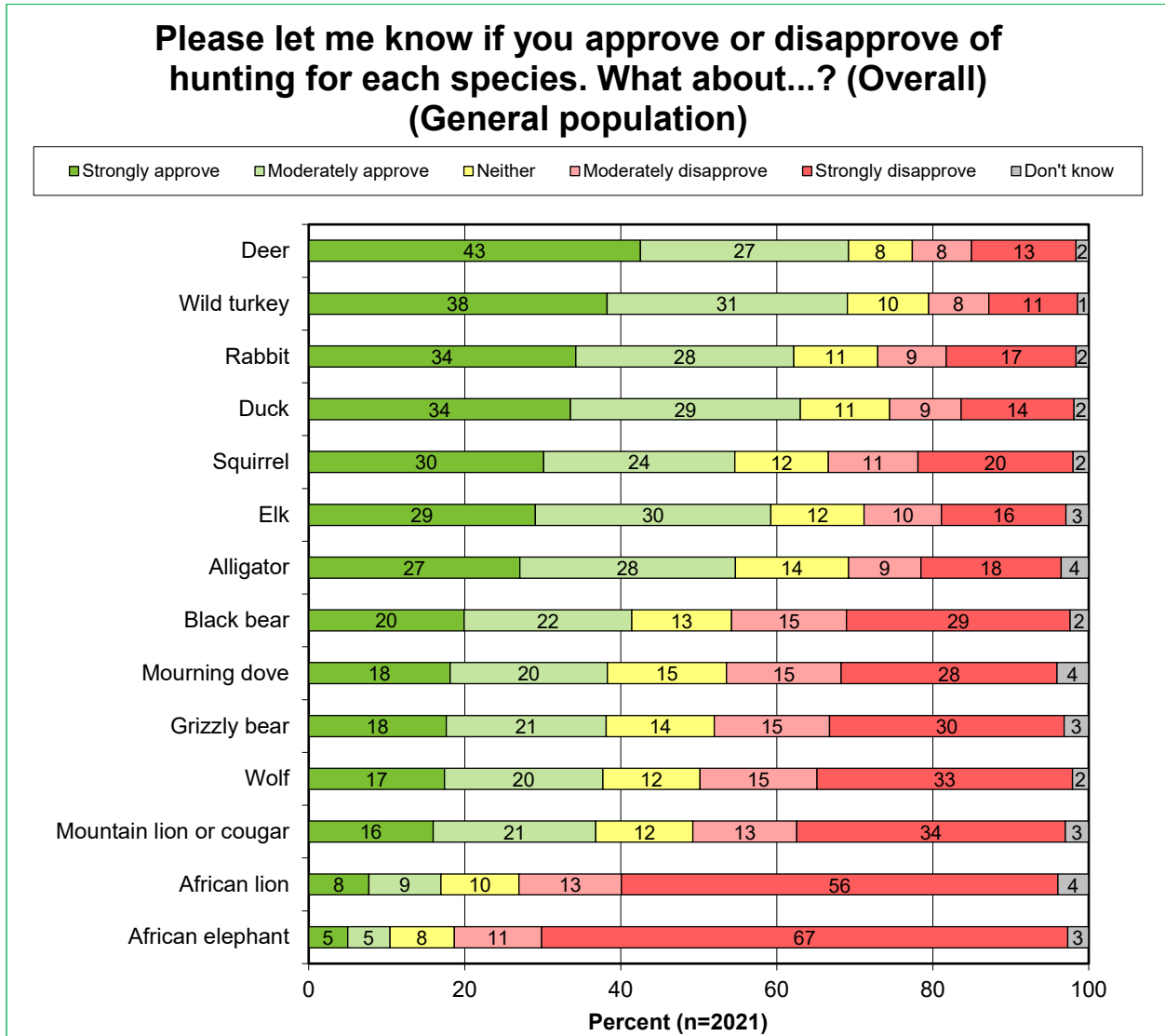


Figure 43. Approval and Disapproval of Hunting Various Species

U.S. residents overall (percentage who approve / disapprove)	Deer	Wild turkey	Rabbit	Duck	Squirrel	Elk	Alligator	Black bear	Mourning dove	Grizzly bear	Wolf	Mountain lion	African lion	African elephant
Total approve	69	69	62	63	55	59	55	41	38	38	38	37	17	10
Total disapprove	21	19	25	24	31	26	27	43	42	45	48	48	69	79

Approval of legal hunting most species has gone down in 2023 compared to previous years (Figures 48 and 49). For example, hunting deer lost 8.5% support, which represents 21.5 million people (statistically significant, $p \leq 0.05$).

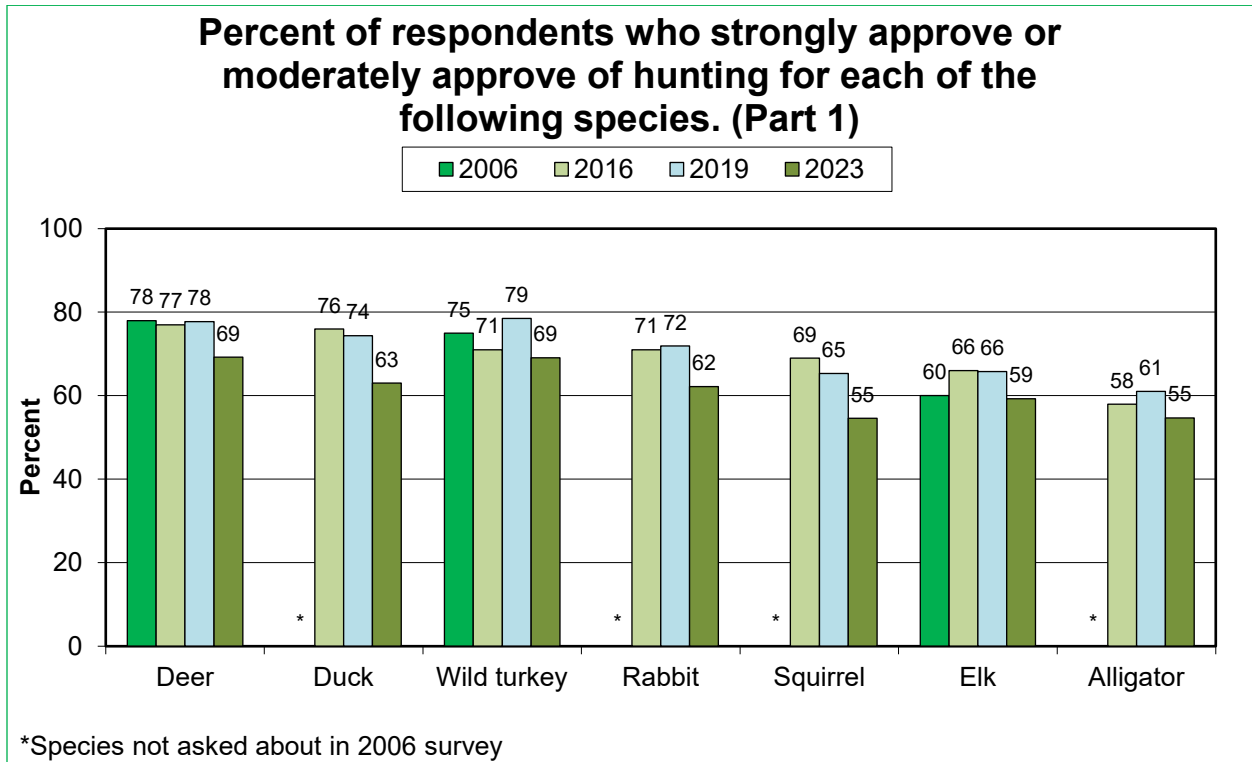


Figure 48. Approval and Disapproval of Hunting Various Species (Trends) (Part 1)

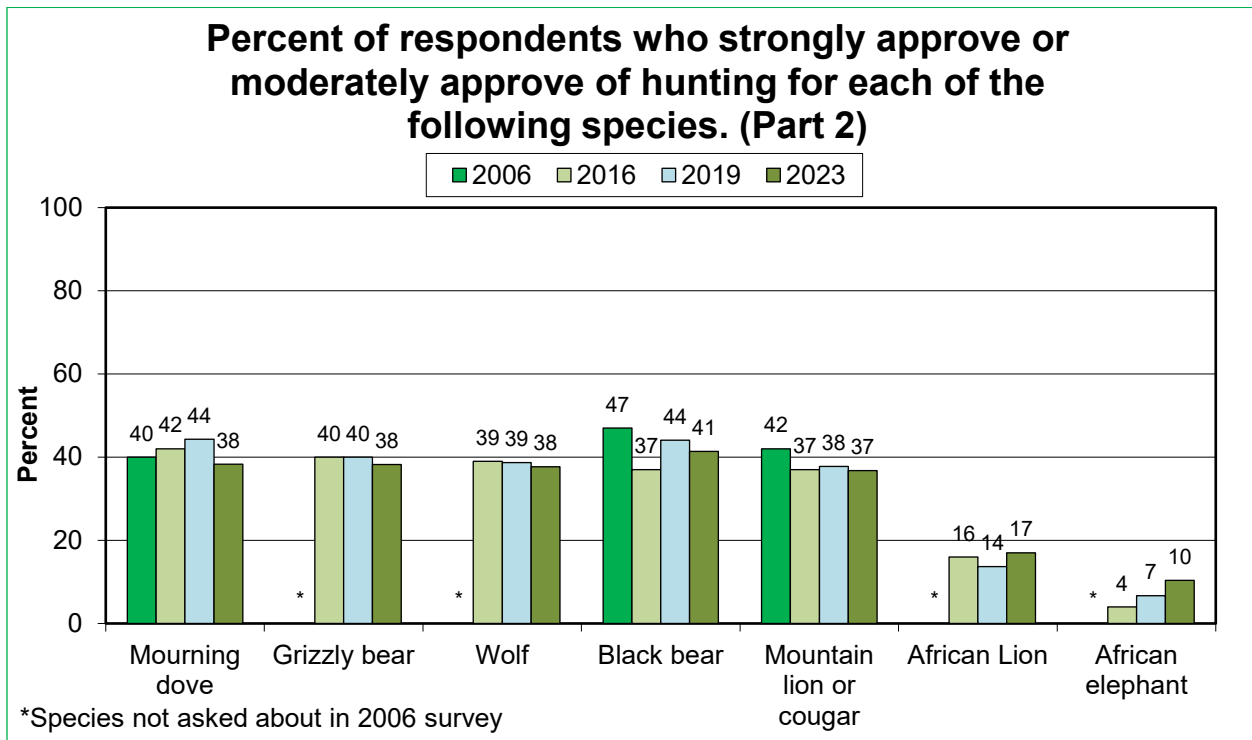


Figure 49. Approval and Disapproval of Hunting Various Species (Trends) (Part 2)

Regarding methods of hunting, the highest approval is hunting with a bow and arrow and hunting with a firearm: both have approximately two thirds of Americans approving (Figure 53 and Table 7). Next in approval is hunting with dogs, with a majority in approval. Below that, less than a majority approve of the rest, with the three lowest having higher disapproval than approval. All of the methods at the bottom affect fair chase, seemingly giving humans too much of an advantage.

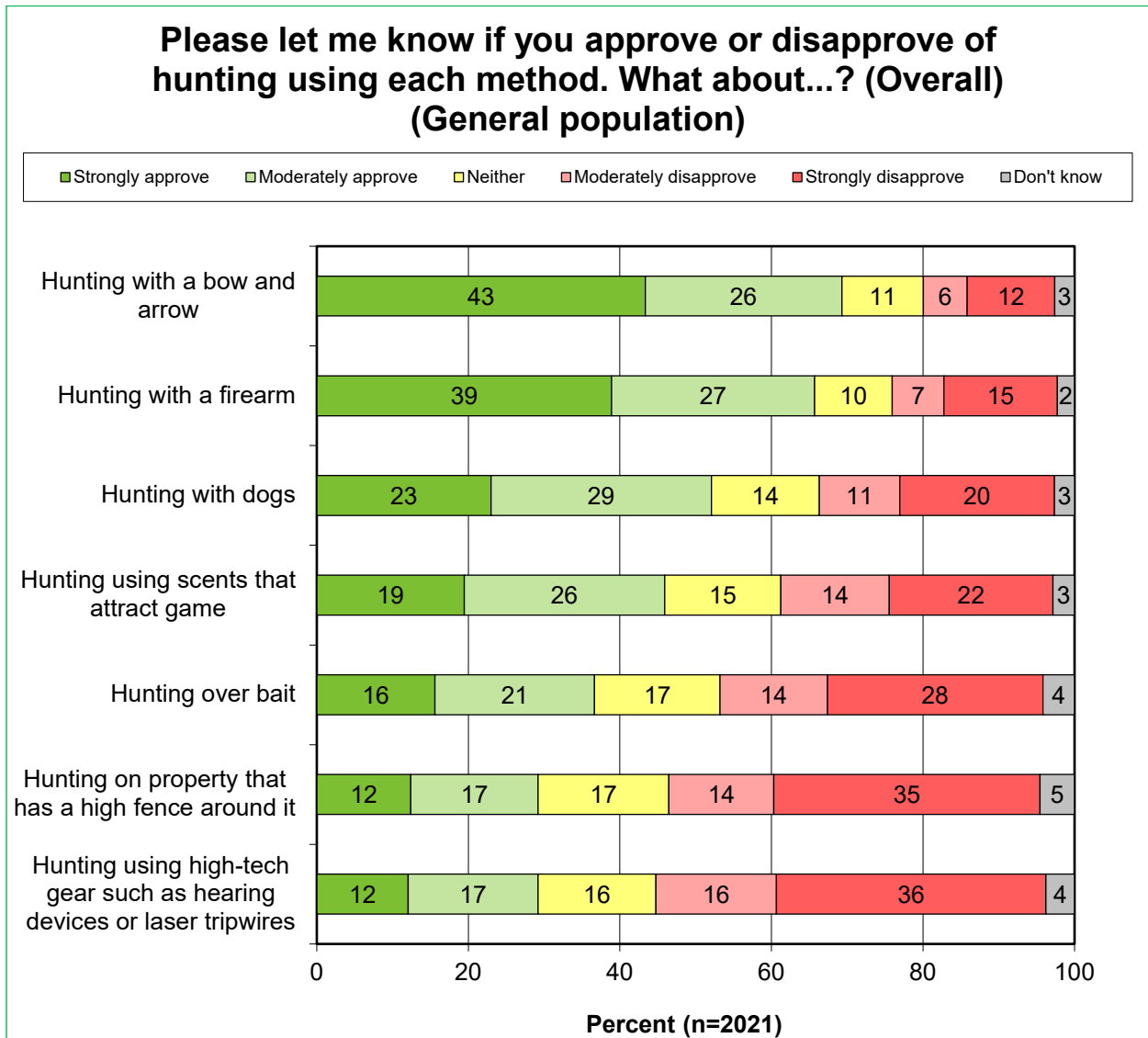


Figure 53. Approval and Disapproval of Hunting Using Various Methods

Table 7. Approval and Disapproval of Hunting Using Various Methods							
U.S. residents overall (percentage who approve / disapprove)	Hunting with a bow and arrow	Hunting with a firearm	Hunting with dogs	Hunting using scents that attract game	Hunting over bait	Hunting on property that has a high-fence around it	Hunting using high-tech gear
Total approve	69	66	52	46	37	29	29
Total disapprove	17	22	31	36	43	49	51

The trends in Figure 58 show lower approval in 2023 for hunting with a bow and arrow and hunting with dogs. There is higher approval for the rest of the methods. Note that hunting with firearms was not previously asked. The wording on the high-fence hunting was as follows in 2006: Hunting in a high-fence preserve. In surveys from 2016 on, the wording was as follows: Hunting on property that has a high fence around it.

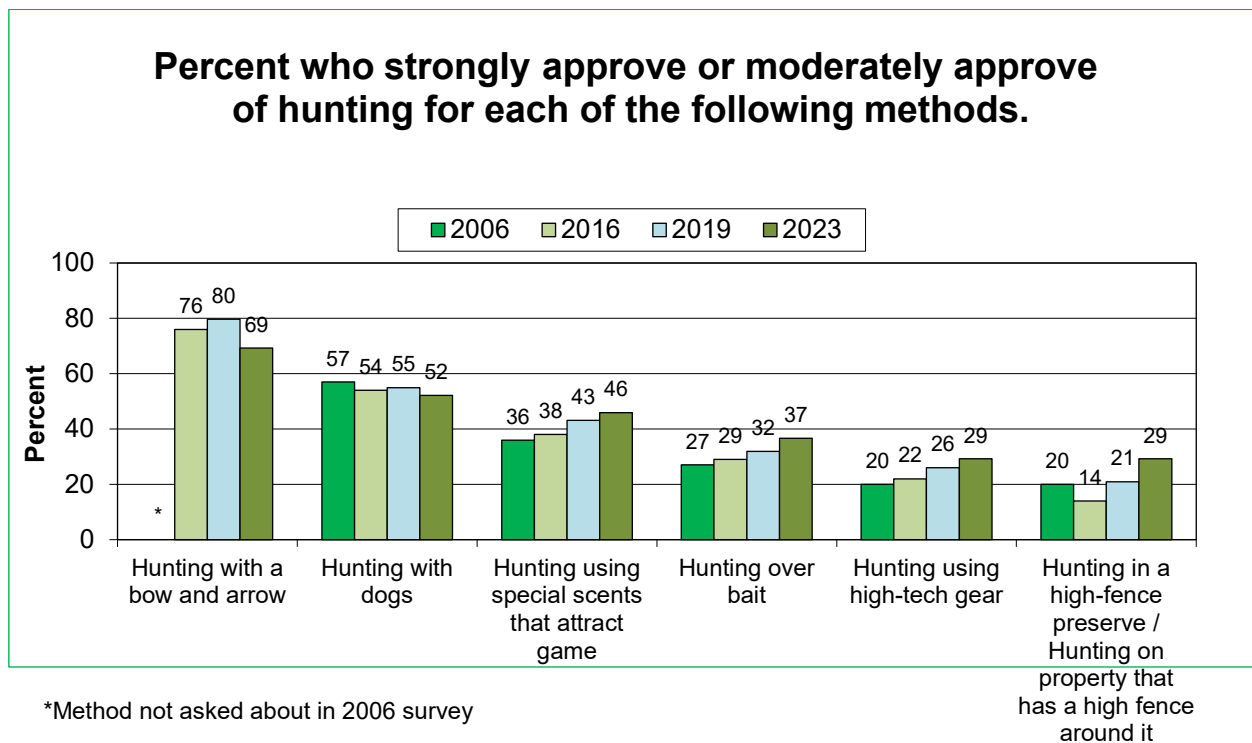


Figure 58. Approval and Disapproval of Hunting Using Various Methods (Trends)

APPROVAL OF LEGAL TARGET/SPORT SHOOTING: VARIOUS REASONS

The survey explored motivations for legal recreational sport shooting in Figure 61. By far, the most acceptable to Americans is to sport shoot to learn self-defense skills, with half of residents *strongly* approving and almost three quarters (74%) approving overall. The next two are in the middle tier: 68% and 62% approving of sport shooting to practice for hunting and for recreation, respectively. The lowest approval is sport shooting for the challenge, although there are still a majority who approve (56%). Table 9 summarizes the results.

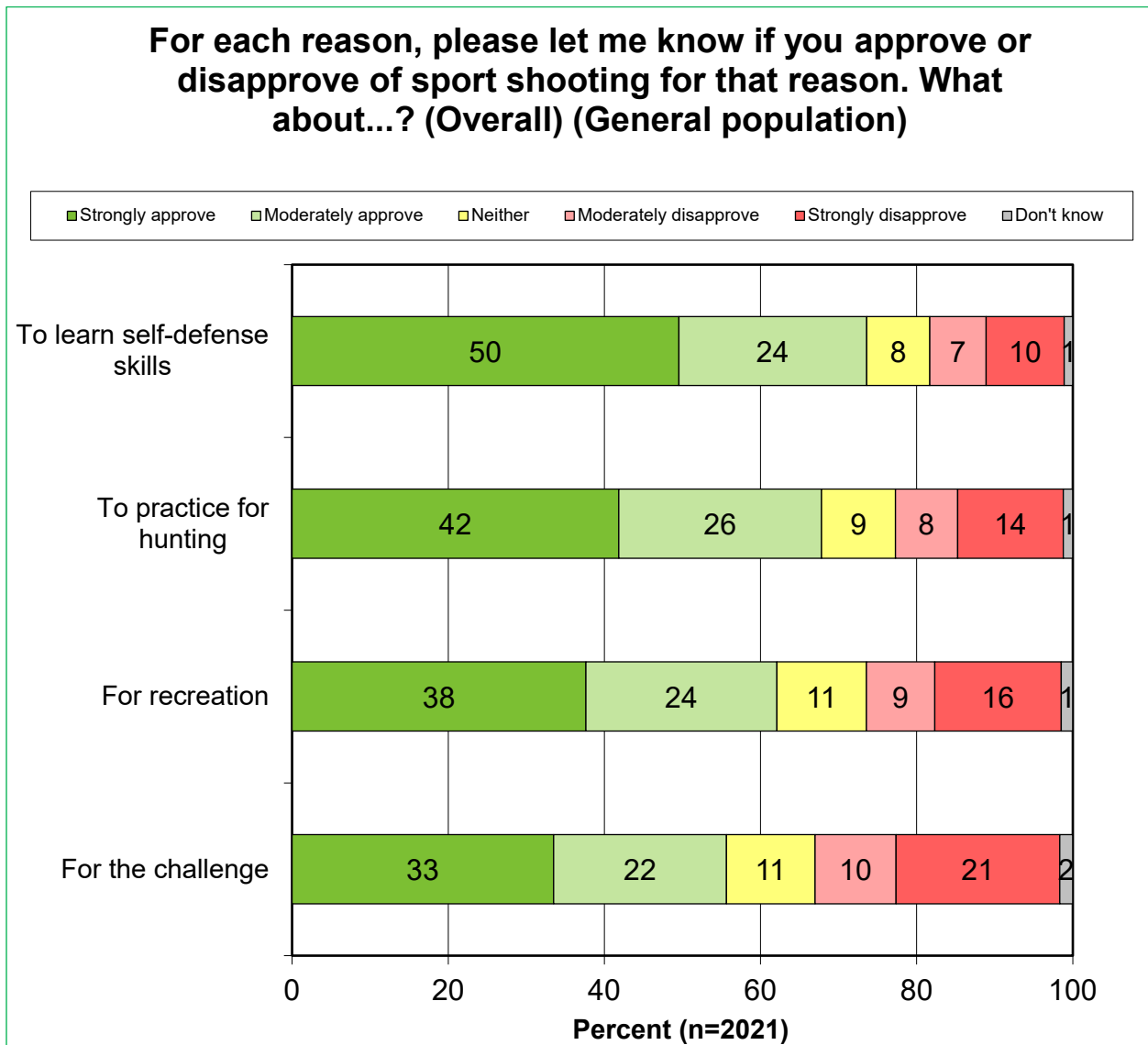
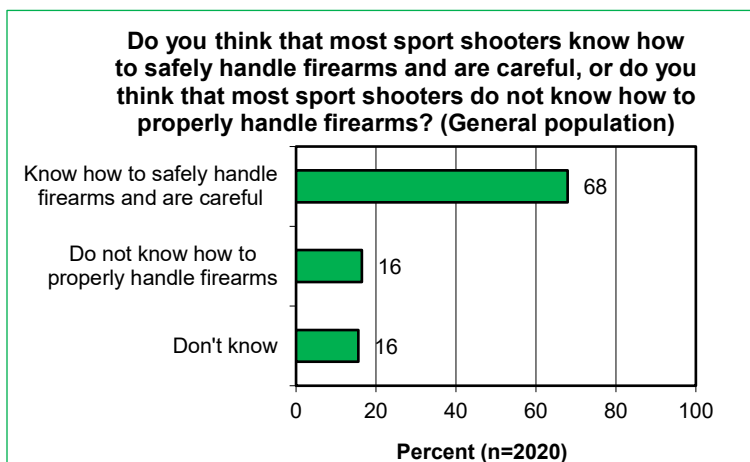


Figure 61. Approval and Disapproval of Sport Shooting for Various Reasons

Table 9. Approval and Disapproval of Sport Shooting for Various Reasons				
U.S. residents overall (percentage who approve / disapprove)	To learn self-defense skills	To practice for hunting	For recreation	For the challenge
Total approve	74	68	62	56
Total disapprove	17	21	25	31

Percentage who approve / disapprove		To learn self-defense skills	To practice for hunting	For recreation	For the challenge
Northeast Region	Total approve	67	64	59	51
	Total disapprove	24	28	28	36
South Region	Total approve	76	69	64	57
	Total disapprove	16	20	23	30
Midwest Region	Total approve	78	75	68	63
	Total disapprove	13	15	21	23
West Region	Total approve	71	62	56	51
	Total disapprove	19	25	29	38

Across all four motivations, the highest approval for sport shooting is among residents of the Midwest Region. The most disapproval is split between the Northeast Region and the West Region. Light green shading shows the highest approval among the four regions, and light red shows the highest disapproval.



Although the large majority of U.S. residents (68%) think that most sport shooters know how to handle firearms and are careful, 16% think that most sport shooters do not know how to properly handle firearms (Figure 66). This latter thinking—that sport shooters do not know—is highest among residents of the West and Northeast Regions (Figure 67).

Figure 66. Opinion on Shooters Safely Handling Firearms

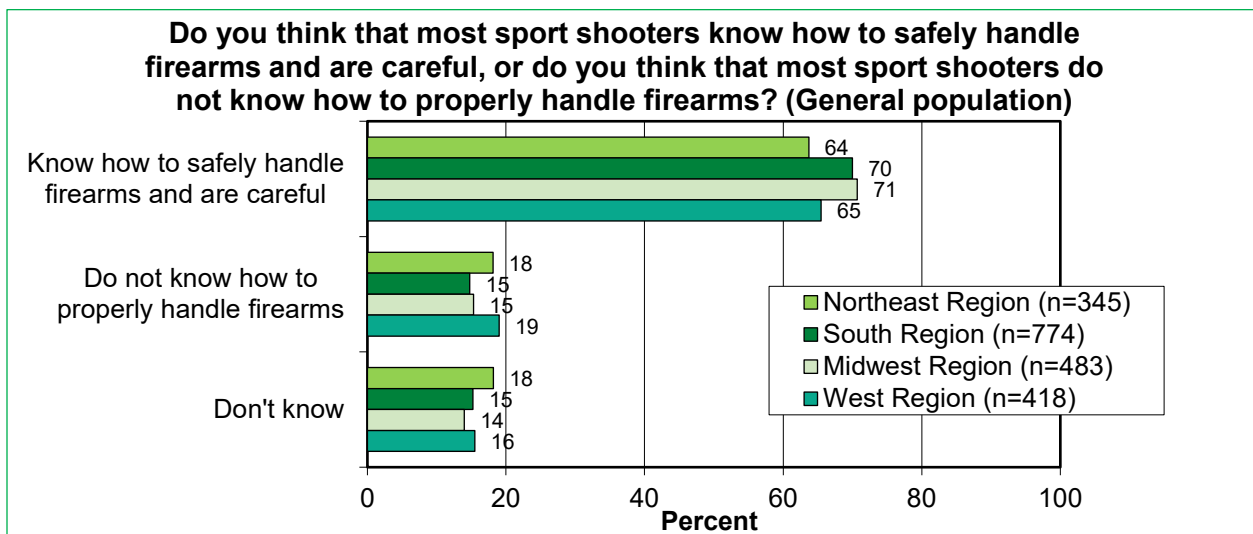


Figure 67. Opinion on Shooters Safely Handling Firearms (Regions)

APPROVAL OF REGULATED TRAPPING FOR VARIOUS REASONS

Although approval of regulated trapping among U.S. residents is at 54%, with disapproval at 28%, the approval of trapping goes up when residents consider some of the reasons for trapping (Figure 68). In fact, every reason for trapping has higher approval than that except for doing so to make money, for fur clothing, or for recreation. The top two reasons are as part of a restoration program, in which the animal lives, and for food, in which the animal is harvested. Therefore, it does not appear that the death of the animal is the issue with approval or disapproval as much as the motivation. Table 11 summarizes the results.

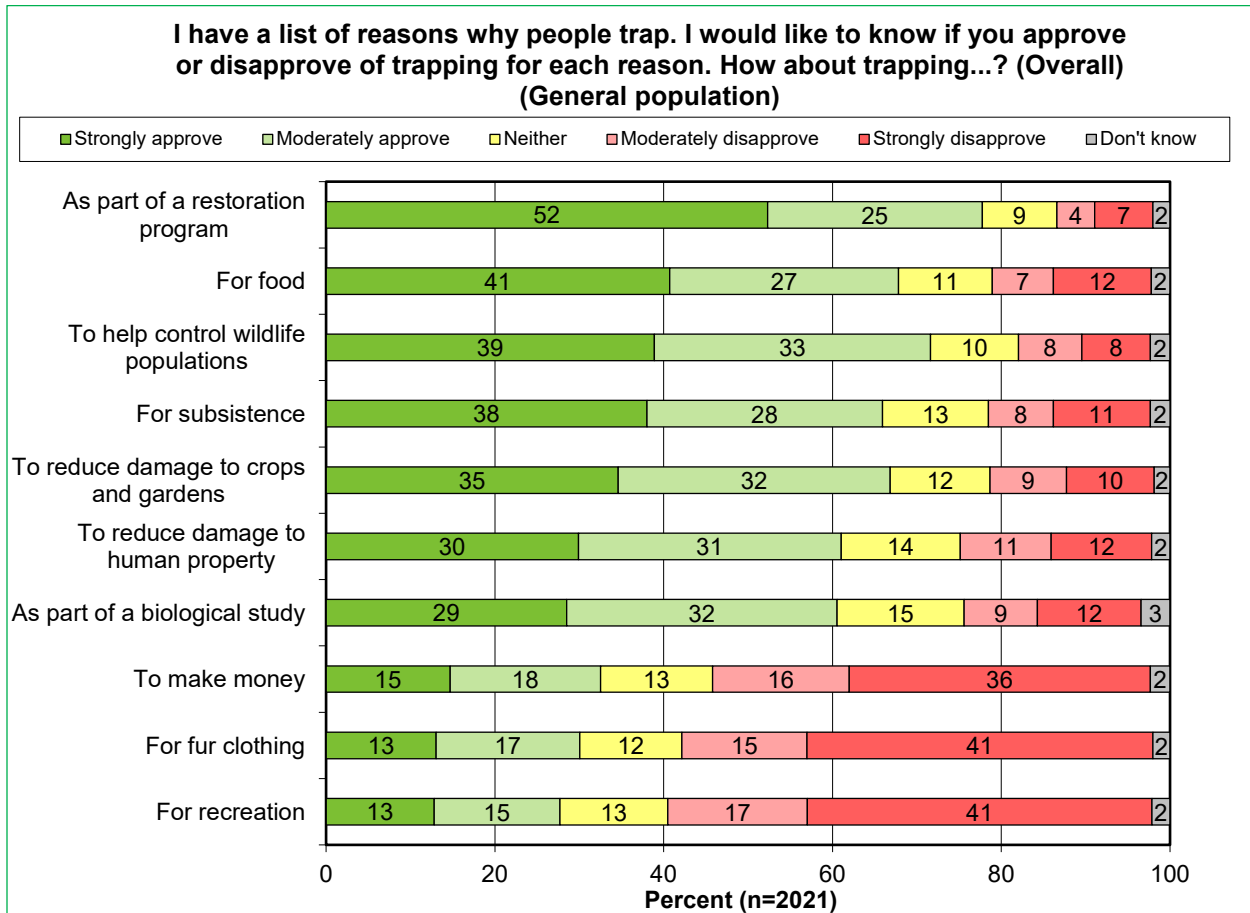


Figure 68. Approval and Disapproval of Trapping for Various Reasons

U.S. residents overall (percentage who approve / disapprove)	As part of a restoration program	For food	To help control wildlife populations	For subsistence	To reduce damage to crops and gardens	To reduce damage to human property	As part of a biological study	To make money	For fur clothing	For recreation
Total approve	78	68	72	66	67	61	61	33	30	28
Total disapprove	11	19	16	19	19	23	21	52	56	57

Table 12. Approval and Disapproval of Trapping for Various Reasons (Regions)										
U.S. residents overall (percentage who approve / disapprove)	As part of a restoration program	For food	To help control wildlife populations	For subsistence	To reduce damage to crops and gardens	To reduce damage to human property	As part of a biological study	To make money	For fur clothing	For recreation
Northeast Region										
Total approve	73	60	65	59	62	54	56	29	28	25
Total disapprove	13	25	21	21	27	30	24	55	56	59
South Region										
Total approve	79	69	73	66	69	65	61	31	31	28
Total disapprove	11	17	14	20	17	19	21	52	55	57
Midwest Region										
Total approve	80	74	74	73	72	66	65	39	33	32
Total disapprove	9	15	13	15	14	21	20	46	56	53
West Region										
Total approve	78	66	72	64	63	56	60	32	27	26
Total disapprove	13	21	16	19	23	24	19	55	57	60

There is one other survey to compare with the current results in the trends (Figure 73). Approval for almost every reason drops in 2023 compared to 2019. For example, the 4% decline in 'Trapping for Food' equates to a loss of support from 10.1 million adult Americans.

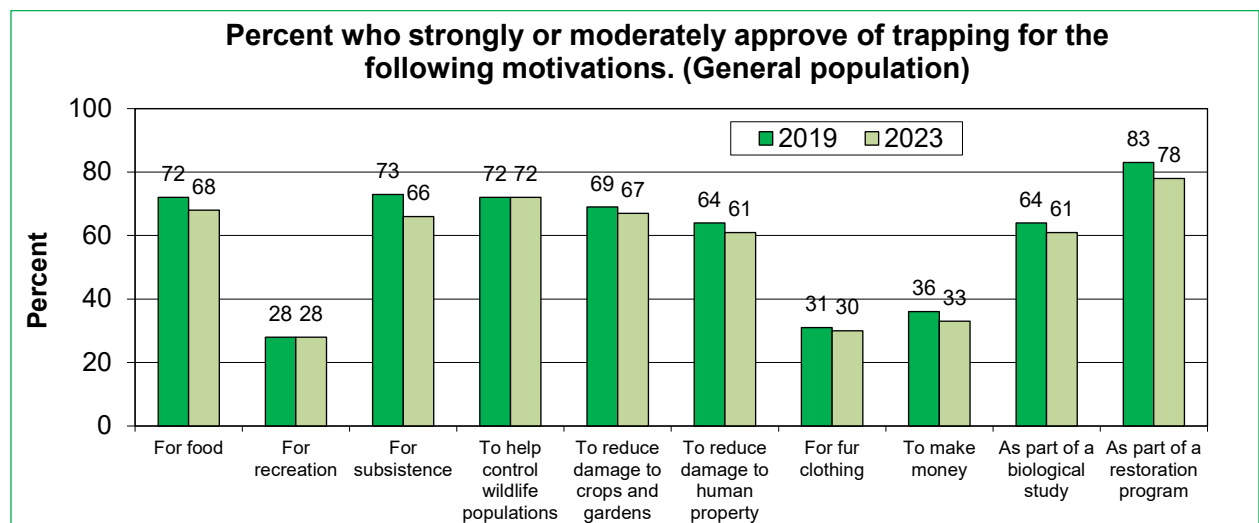


Figure 73. Approval and Disapproval of Trapping for Various Reasons (Trends)

PARTICIPATION IN AND SUPPORT OF CONSERVATION ACTIONS

Almost two thirds of U.S. residents consider themselves to be conservationists (Figure 74). The lowest percentage is among Midwest Region residents (Figure 75).

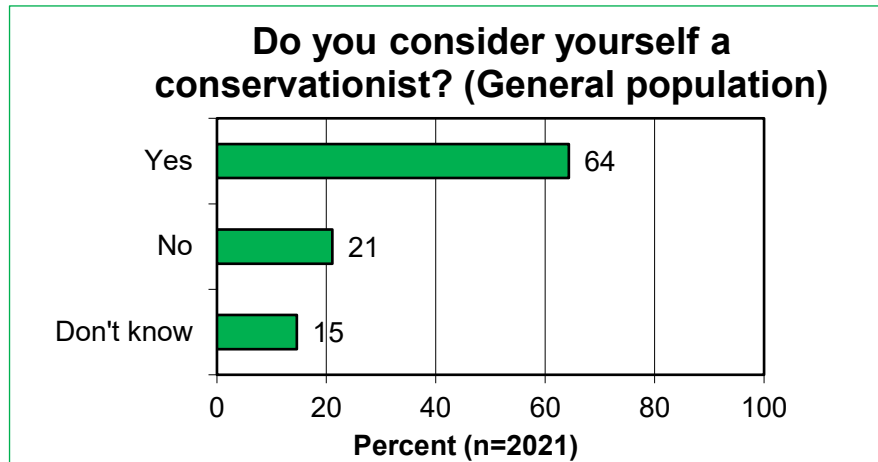


Figure 74. Considers Oneself a Conservationist

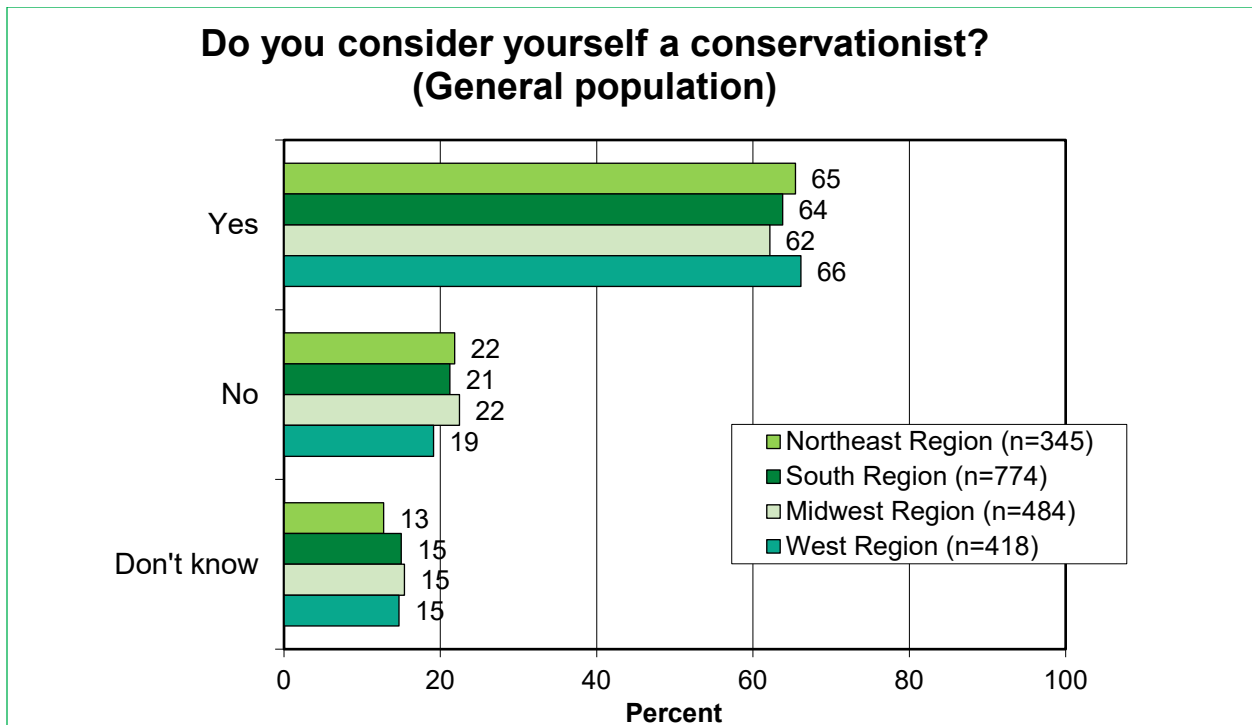


Figure 75. Considers Oneself a Conservationist (Regions)

One analysis looked at two of the questions in this section by cross tabulating the results among those who fished, went sport shooting, hunted, or trapped. Table 13 shows the percentages who consider themselves to be a conservationist. Those who fish, shoot, hunt, or trap have a higher rate considering themselves to be a conservationist than do U.S. residents overall. Hunters and trappers consider themselves to be a conservationist at a higher rate than do anglers and shooters. Note that some people will be represented in more than one row in the table, as respondents could have done multiple activities.

Table 13. Crosstabulations by Participation in Outdoor Recreation: Considers Oneself a Conservationist	
Do you consider yourself a conservationist?	Percent Who Said Yes
Hunting with a bow and arrow (or bowhunting)	84
Hunting with firearms	82
Trapping	81
Recreational saltwater fishing	74
Recreational freshwater fishing	73
Target shooting or sport shooting	68
General population overall	64

Table 14 shows the question about taking trash out of the woods or waters among participants in the activities. Hunters are the most likely to take trash out of the woods or waters. Again, note that some people will be represented in more than one row in the table, as respondents could have done multiple activities.

Table 14. Crosstabulations by Participation in Outdoor Recreation: Taking Trash Out of Woods or Waters	
Have you ever taken trash that was NOT yours out of the woods or waters while you were participating in hunting, fishing, trapping, or target shooting? (Asked of those who participated in hunting, fishing, or shooting in the past 3 years.)	Percent Who Said Yes
Hunting with a bow and arrow (or bowhunting)	86
Hunting with firearms	85
Recreational saltwater fishing	80
Recreational freshwater fishing	78
Target shooting or sport shooting	76
Trapping	75

PARTICIPATION IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

The survey asked about six outdoor recreational activities (to include indoor shooting as well as outdoor shooting), and freshwater fishing was the most popular: 40% went in the past 3 years (Figure 82). In the middle tier of activities are sport shooting and saltwater fishing, with hunting and trapping rounding out the list. South Region residents were the most active, with only 42% doing none of the listed activities (Figure 83). Another obvious difference is that the Midwest, without any saltwater coastlines, is the highest in freshwater fishing and lowest in saltwater fishing, as Midwest anglers must travel far to participate.

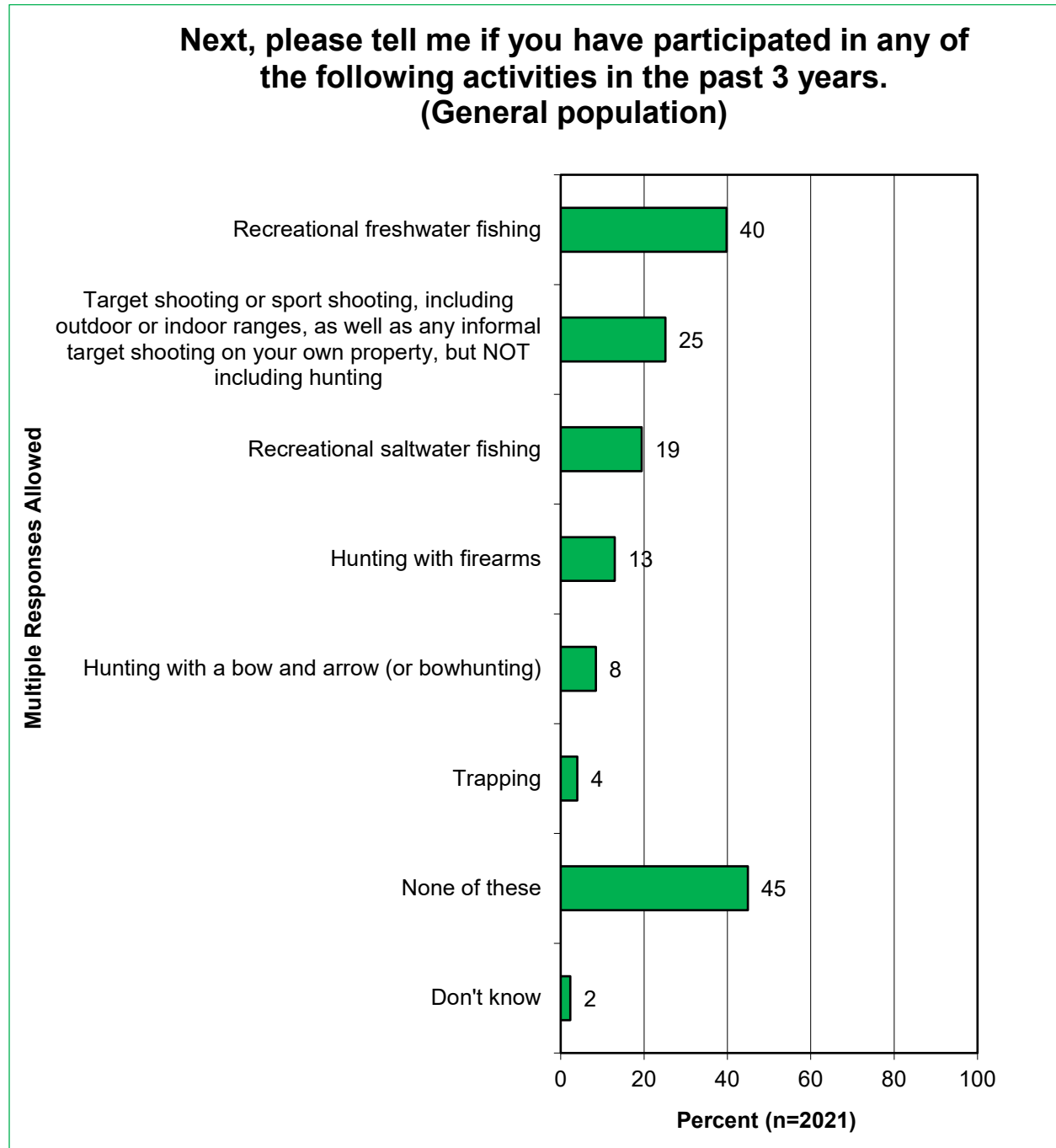


Figure 82. Participation in Outdoor Activities

HARVEST AND CONSUMPTION OF GAME MEAT

As shown in Figures 90 through 92, about 2 in every 5 Americans indicate that they ate wild-caught game meat. About a third of those who ate game meat had harvested it themselves.



Figure 90. Eating Game Meat

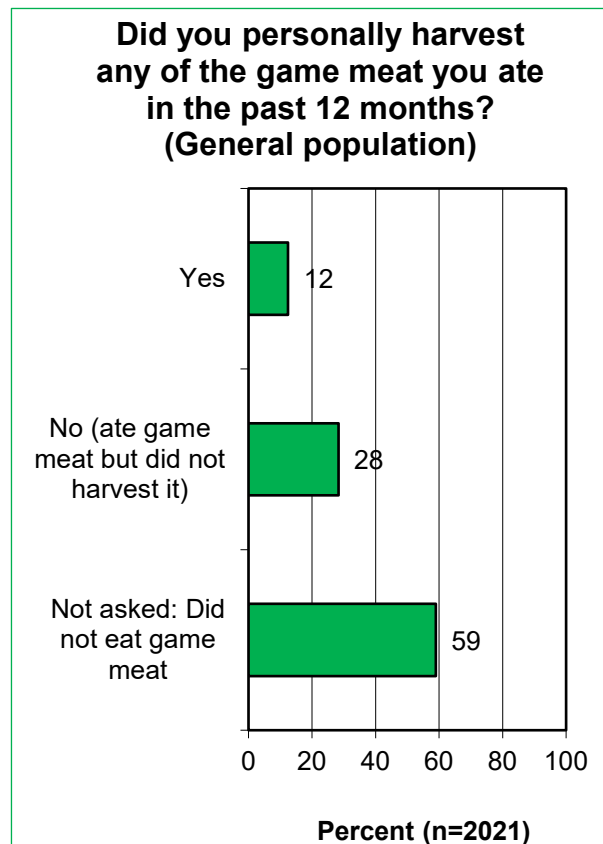


Figure 91. Harvest of Game Meat, All Residents

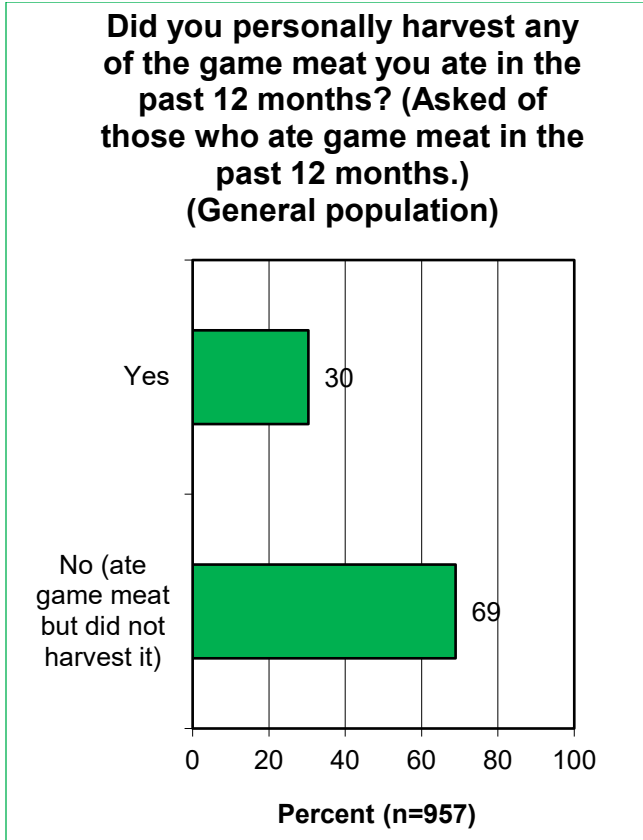


Figure 92. Of those that ate game meat in past 12 mo.

ABOUT:

OUTDOOR STEWARDS OF CONSERVATION FOUNDATION (OSCF):

Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation, Inc. is an IRS registered 501c3 nonprofit organization with a mission to use research-based communications and engagement programs to help recruit the next generation of HATS™ (**H**unters, **A**nglers, **T**rappers, and **S**hooters) and promote the fact that HATS™ are the primary funders and stewards of land, fish and wildlife conservation in America.

To support their mission, OSCF developed and manages programs such as:

COME WITH!™

This R3 (Recruit, Retain, Reactivate) communication program works with industry companies such as; manufacturers, retailers, ranges, NGO's, media and state fish and wildlife agencies to activate America's 60+ million avid HATS™ to invite someone new to COME WITH! them to the range, water or field in an effort to increase participation.

CONNECTING WITH CONSERVATION™

OSCF uses this informative communication program to work with industry and agency partners to communicate how conservation is funded in America. The three main parts to the conservation funding cycle include; 1) excise tax paying manufacturers, 2) state fish and wildlife agencies, and 3) HATS™. 'Connecting with Conservation' includes a series of videos and social media postings that showcase leaders from industry and wildlife agencies explaining the funding cycle and thanking HATS™ for their contributions to conservation.

FILL A BAG WHILE FILLING YOUR TAG™

The first ever, year-round, national conservation engagement program that works with industry and agency partners to distribute reusable, biodegradable bags to HATS™ all across America. HATS™ take the bags with them while out hunting, fishing, trapping or target shooting and use the bags to take out any trash they may find while outdoors. Bags are preprinted with messages that ask HATS™ to post photos or short videos of themselves with their bag and trash to their social media accounts to show others who the true stewards of conservation are. Posts include #TrophyTrash in order to be tracked on social media sites such as Instagram.

To learn more about OSCF or our programs contact:

Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation

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ABOUT RESPONSIVE MANAGEMENT:

Responsive Management is an internationally recognized survey research firm specializing in natural resource and outdoor recreation issues. Our mission is to help natural resource and outdoor recreation agencies, businesses, and organizations better understand and work with their constituents, customers, and the public.

Focusing only on natural resource and outdoor recreation issues, Responsive Management has conducted telephone, mail, and online surveys, as well as multi-modal surveys, on-site intercepts, focus groups, public meetings, personal interviews, needs assessments, program evaluations, marketing and communication plans, and other forms of human dimensions research measuring how people relate to the natural world for more than 30 years. Utilizing our in-house, full-service survey facilities with 75 professional interviewers, we have conducted studies in all 50 states and 15 countries worldwide, totaling more than 1,000 human dimensions projects *only* on natural resource and outdoor recreation issues.

Responsive Management has conducted research for every state fish and wildlife agency and every federal natural resource agency, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Coast Guard, and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Additionally, we have also provided research for all the major conservation NGOs including the Archery Trade Association, the American Sportfishing Association, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Dallas Safari Club, Ducks Unlimited, Environmental Defense Fund, the Izaak Walton League of America, the National Rifle Association, the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the National Wildlife Federation, the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Safari Club International, the Sierra Club, Trout Unlimited, and the Wildlife Management Institute.

Other nonprofit and NGO clients include the American Museum of Natural History, the BoatUS Foundation, the National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs, the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators, and the Ocean Conservancy. As well, Responsive Management conducts market research and product testing for numerous outdoor recreation manufacturers and industry leaders, such as Winchester Ammunition, Vista Outdoor (whose brands include Federal Premium, CamelBak, Bushnell, Primos, and more), Trijicon, Yamaha, and others.

Responsive Management also provides data collection for the nation's top universities, including Auburn University, Clemson University, Colorado State University, Duke University, George Mason University, Michigan State University, Mississippi State University, North Carolina State University, Oregon State University, Penn State University, Rutgers University, Stanford University, Texas Tech, University of California-Davis, University of Florida, University of Montana, University of New Hampshire, University of Southern California, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Tech, West Virginia University, Yale University, and many more.

Our research has been upheld in U.S. Courts, used in peer-reviewed journals, and presented at major wildlife and natural resource conferences around the world. Responsive Management's research has also been featured in many of the nation's top media, including *Newsweek*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, CNN, National Public Radio, and on the front pages of *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*.

responsivemanagement.com



For additional research and information about Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation, visit www.OutdoorStewards.org