

By **SARAH GREEN, SUN MEDIA**

Two-thirds of Ontario voters want a ban on handguns, an exclusive Sun Media/Nanos Research poll shows.

Support for a handgun ban was even stronger among women with three out of four wanting to see the weapons prohibited.

"The polling shows that there's a very strong appetite for banning handguns in Ontario," said pollster Nik Nanos.

"It's very unusual to get this level of intensity of support on an issue. What it shows is this basically cuts across all groups and a wide variety of Ontarians across the province."

Premier Dalton McGuinty repeated his call for a ban on handguns earlier this year in the wake of a high-profile shooting death of an innocent bystander in Toronto with a legally registered pistol.

A stray bullet, allegedly intended for a strip club bouncer, killed 42-year-old John O'Keefe instantly Jan. 12 as the health store manager walked to the subway on Yonge St. near the Brass Rail.

Two young Scarborough men, who had been kicked out of the strip club, face first-degree murder charges.

INNOCENT BYSTANDER

Less than a week later, a dinner-time shootout killed another innocent bystander, Hou Chang Mao, as he worked at a grocery store.

"When you see (poll) numbers like this, it's not surprising Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals have been agitating for a ban on handguns and have been advocating that issue with the federal Conservatives," Nanos said.

Ontario Attorney General Chris Bentley and Public Safety Minister Rick Bartolucci pressed their federal counterparts last Monday for a handgun ban during a meeting in Ottawa.

They received a lukewarm response.

"Let's take the next step and get serious about decreasing the availability of handguns," Bartolucci said at the time.

"This could be an easy political win for the premier of Ontario and it's not surprising that he is persistent in his

advocacy for this," Nanos said.

The random telephone poll of 500 Ontario voters was conducted between Feb. 5 to Feb. 8. It is considered accurate within 4.4%, 19 times out of 20. Details of the poll are available at nanosresearch.com.

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