

# Opinion

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## Public backs anti-bikie laws but not at any price



Surge: Violence involving bikies has sparked calls for tougher laws.

With the country enthralled and largely appalled by the latest outbreak of bikie violence, an interesting survey of community attitudes to the outlaw gangs produced yesterday by Labor's national pollster UMR sent some conflicting messages to our lawmakers.

A nationwide survey of 1000 voter-age people revealed strong support for laws to contain bikie activity and for the Commonwealth to step in and draft laws that would

apply across the nation. About 70 per cent of Australians thought that current laws to control bikie gangs were not sufficient and three in four supported the introduction of Australia-wide laws by the Federal Government.

But Australians balked at introducing laws which would impinge on civil liberties both for themselves and the bikies.

When the voters were asked whether they would still support stronger laws if it meant a lessening of civil liberties for everyone, support for the concept dropped to

43 per cent. But West Australians were most willing to give up some freedoms in exchange for a crackdown on bikie gangs with close to 50 per cent maintaining they would continue to support tougher laws.

And when asked whether bikies should be legally prevented from associating with each under threat of imprisonment, support fell to 31 per cent, which is still a reasonable figure given the drastic measure being suggested.

As could be expected support for a nationwide crackdown was

strongest among conservative voters and weakest among Green supporters.

A majority of conservatives wanted a crackdown even if it meant a loss of civil liberties overall while only 16 per cent of Greens voters found a trade-off acceptable.

UMR managing director John Utting said public support for tougher laws was no surprise given recent bikie violence.

"But one could make the point that Australians are cautious of a heavy-handed approach," he said.

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