The Effects of Concealed-Carry Laws

Apart from specifying classes of people who are prohibited from possessing any type of firearm, federal law imposes no restrictions on who may carry a concealed weapon in public, although it specifically grants concealed-carry rights to active and retired law enforcement officers (18 U.S.C. 926). State laws typically specify who may carry concealed weapons and the procedures those people must follow when they wish to exercise this right.

Most states once prohibited the concealed carrying of guns in public, although none does so now. Over the past several decades, many states have relaxed restrictions on concealed handguns. Several states allow individuals to carry concealed weapons without a permit (referred to as permitless carry), but most require gun owners to obtain a permit to carry a concealed handgun. Some states have shifted from laws that restrict concealed-carry permits to those who can demonstrate a legitimate need to carry a weapon or that give law enforcement some discretion in issuing concealed-carry permits (referred to as may-issue laws) to laws that guarantee the right to a concealed-carry permit for all citizens who are not prohibited from possessing a handgun (referred to as shall-issue or right-to-carry laws). The key difference among these law categories is that permitless-carry laws do not require individuals to obtain a permit or license before they can carry a concealed weapon, whereas may-issue and shall-issue laws set forth conditions by which such permits may be granted.

There are several ways that concealed-carry laws could affect gun violence and considerable disagreement about which are most likely. Permitless-carry and shall-issue laws that make it easier for citizens to carry concealed weapons could increase the number of people carrying guns. The increased prevalence of concealed weapons could lead to increased crime and violence if disagreements, perceived threats, and conflicts are more likely to result in casualties when a handgun is readily available. Alternatively, concealed-carry laws could lead to reductions in the prevalence or severity of violent crime and mass shootings either because the prospect of encountering an armed victim serves as a deterrent or because victims will more frequently be able to use a gun to defend themselves (Fortunato, 2015).

Whether those who carry concealed weapons pose an elevated or reduced risk of crime or violence is the subject of debate (Violence Policy Center, 2017; Lott, Whitley, and Riley, 2016). A comparison of criminal conviction
rates among holders and nonholders of concealed handgun licenses in Texas found that license holders were less likely to be convicted of crimes, but the license holders' convictions were significantly more likely to involve deadly conduct and intentional killings (Phillips et al., 2013). The likelihood of encountering an armed victim may further lead to increased gun violence by inducing more criminals to carry and use firearms. Alternatively, these laws may result in substitution by criminals to other types of crime, such as larceny, where the probability of encountering armed resistance is lower (Kovandzic and Marvell, 2003).

Each hypothesized effect of relaxed restrictions on concealed carrying produces an effect by increasing the proportion of the population or some subpopulation that is armed. However, data on the prevalence of concealed carrying are not generally available. Indeed, data on the number of persons with carry permits are not readily available for many states. One estimate suggests that the number of concealed-carry permit holders in the United States exceeded 14.5 million in 2016, with substantial variation across states depending on the permit fees in place, duration that the law has been in effect, and whether the law allows local authorities discretion in issuing permits (i.e., may issue versus shall issue) (Lott, Whitley, and Riley, 2016).

We identified only one study that analyzed how changes in the number of concealed-carry permits related to changes in various types of violent crime (Kovandzic and Marvell, 2003). The authors analyzed data from 58 Florida counties spanning 1980–2000, providing coverage of the period before and after the passage of Florida’s shall-issue law in 1987. While this study did not analyze the effect of the shall-issue policy change, it did examine how changes in the number of concealed-carry permits over time and across counties corresponded with changes in various types of violent crime. The authors found uncertain effects of changes in per capita concealed-carry permit rates on violent crime.

There is likely to be little effect of concealed-carry laws on hunting or recreational gun use. However, shall-issue policies may encourage more individuals to obtain firearms, thereby increasing handgun sales (Steidley, 2016). To assess these or any other effects of concealed-carry laws, one would ideally like to know whether there are greater increases in gun ownership and carrying in states following passage of shall-issue or permitless-carry laws compared with states that have more-restrictive laws, but such data have not been collected systematically over time. The direct effects of increased concealed carrying by private citizens on suicides, unintentional injuries and deaths, and defensive gun use should be strongest for incidents involving handguns and that occur outside the home (where the laws apply). Similarly, for violent crime, one would expect concealed-carry laws to have greater effects (either negative or positive depending on the role of deterrence) on assaults or homicides occurring in public venues compared with those occurring within the home. Should the effects of concealed-carry laws be driven primarily by expanding the prevalence of gun ownership, then their effects could extend to both private and public areas for such outcomes as suicides, firearm homicides, and unintentional injuries and deaths.

### OUTCOMES THAT MAY BE INCREASED BY CONCEALED-CARRY LAWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unintentional Injuries and Deaths</th>
<th>Violent Crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence that shall-issue concealed-carry laws may increase unintentional firearm injuries among adults is limited, and evidence for the effect of these laws on such injuries among children is inconclusive.</td>
<td>Evidence that shall-issue concealed-carry laws may increase violent crime is limited. Evidence for the effect of shall-issue laws on total homicides, firearm homicides, robberies, assaults, and rapes is inconclusive.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://www.rand.org/research/gun-policy/analysis/concealed-carry.html#
OUTCOMES THAT MAY BE DECREASED BY CONCEALED-CARRY LAWS

We found no qualifying studies showing that concealed-carry laws decreased any of the eight outcomes we investigated.

OUTCOMES WITH INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE FOR THE EFFECT OF CONCEALED-CARRY LAWS

Gun Industry Outcomes
Evidence for the effect of shall-issue concealed-carry laws on gun ownership is inconclusive.

Mass Shootings
Evidence for the effect of permitless-carry laws and shall-issue concealed-carry laws on mass shootings is inconclusive.

Suicide
Evidence for the effect of shall-issue concealed-carry laws on total suicides, firearm suicides, and firearm self-injuries is inconclusive.

OUTCOMES WITH NO STUDIES THAT MET OUR INCLUSION CRITERIA

- Defensive gun use
- Hunting and recreation
- Officer-involved shootings

Review the inclusion criteria and methodology »

Notes


3. Mo. Senate Bill No. 656.


https://www.rand.org/research/gun-policy/analysis/concealed-carry.html#

References


United States Code, Title 18, Section 926, Rules and Regulations.


View the full project bibliography

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