

Impact of Concealed Carry Weapon Laws on Crime Rates

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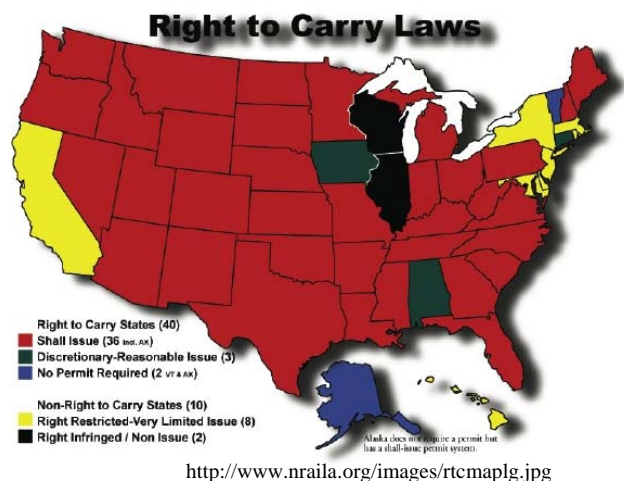
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Concealed carry weapon laws have been unsuccessful in significantly affecting the rates of violent crime in states where they have been enacted. Several studies have been published on this topic, using information collected on crimes and rates between 1973 and 2000; each study used a date range between those two years. This paper will give a brief history of concealed carry weapon laws and will then focus on studies that analyze the impact of those laws.

There are four types of concealed carry weapon laws. First is unrestricted, which means that anyone can carry a concealed weapon without a state-issued license. The second is shall-issue, which means that as long as the applicant meets certain preset requirements, they can receive a permit. The third is may-issue, which means the authorities may deny an applicant a license even if that applicant meets the requirements, if the authorities feel that the applicant has not presented a reasonable need to carry a concealed weapon; depending on the state, this discretionary granting of permits tends to make the states either shall-issue or no-issue. And finally the fourth is no-issue, which means that concealed weapons permits are not issued in that state (Cleary, 1999).

Concealed carry weapon laws have a long history. Currently, only two states, Wisconsin and Illinois, still have no-issue/no carry laws; all the rest have passed legislation permitting concealed carry. The map shows the states that currently have concealed carry weapon laws (NRA-ILA, 2009).



In January 1997, John Lott and David Mustard published a study called *Crime, Deterrence, and Right-to-Carry Concealed Handguns* in the University of Chicago's *Journal of*

Legal Studies. Lott later updated that study and released it as a book (now available in two editions) under the title *More Guns, Less Crime*. Both studies produced similar results. The original study was based on vast amounts of data collected from 1977 and 1992 on reported crimes and crime rates from counties in ten states that implanted concealed carry weapon laws during that time period (Kovandzic, 2005). The second study added additional years of data and updated shall-issue laws. The data used came from the FBI's annual Uniform Crime Report, which is a compilation of local agencies' crime reports. Lott and Mustard also used demographic data from the Census Bureau and U.S. Commerce Department as variables that might affect an area's crime rates. They used panel data regression techniques to analyze the data. This technique uses two-stage regression methods to estimate the limits of the same multiple variable model to explain each variables, while statistically controlling demographic factors. Numerous regression analyses were run using different sub-samples of the data, as well as other model specifications, in order to verify the results (Donohue, 2003).

Lott and Mustard's results showed that when shall-issue laws were passed, violent crimes, such as murder, rape, and aggravated assault, in that state decreased by some 4% to 7%; this is known as the deterrent effect. Also, the number of non-violent crimes increased as people influenced by the deterrent effect of confronting armed individuals switched from violent crimes to property crimes; this is sometimes called the substitution effect (Kovandzic, 2005). Lott and Mustard noted that the deterrent effect of concealed carry weapon laws was most noticeable in high-crime and high population counties, while the substitution effect of switching to property crime seemed to be most obvious in low-crime and smaller population counties. However, Lott and Mustard conceded that although their study showed that concealed carry weapon laws have a

deterrent effect on crime, high arrest and conviction rates produce more reliable and noticeable effects on crime rates (Cleary, 1999).

Following the publishing of Lott's studies, several other scholarly researches stepped in to comment on and either corroborate or counter his findings. One study that countered Lott's results was published in 2003 by John Donohue and Ian Ayres; it analyzed Lott's studies in *Shooting Down the More Guns, Less Crime Hypothesis* and found that his results could easily be manipulated by changing a few criteria or by using the exact same data but a different technique for analyzing it. The result of the study showed that concealed carry weapon laws actually increased the crime rates in states where they had been passed (Donohue, 2003).

Another study entitled *An evaluation of state firearm regulations and homicide and suicide death rates*, done by M Rosengart, et al in 2005, found "that when a 'shall issue' law was present, the rate of firearm homicides was greater, RR 1.11 (95% confidence interval 0.99 to 1.24), than when the law was not present, as was the rate of all homicides, RR 1.08 (95% CI 0.98 to 1.17), although this was not statistically significant." The study found that no statistically significant reduction in the rates of firearm homicides or total homicides could be found for any law. Also, no statistically significant change in firearm suicide rates could be connected to any laws. The study concluded that implementing a shall-issue law with few restrictions on obtaining or carrying a concealed weapon may be linked to increased firearm homicide rates. However, no law was connected to a statistically significant decrease in firearm homicide or suicide rates (Rosengart, 2005).

In 2005, Tomislav V. Kovandzic, Thomas B. Marvell, and Lynne M. Vieraitis published a study entitled *The Impact of "Shall-Issue" Concealed Handgun Laws on Violent Crime Rates in the Homicide Studies*. Kovandzic, et al, wanted to study how shall-issue concealed carry

weapon laws affected violent crime rates. As in Lott's study, this study used panel data from the FBI's annual Uniform Crime Report. Data was collected from 1980 to 2000 for more than 175 U.S. cities with a population in 1990 of at least 100,000. Information from cities was used because a majority of crimes occur in cities, and it is easier to track changes when dealing with larger numbers (Kovandzic, 2005).

The data pulled was related to the four violent crimes listed in the Uniform Crime Report, including homicide, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. However, the authors note that the results for rape and assault should be interpreted with caution because the reporting of those crimes changed drastically during the years the study data was collected. The technique used to analyze the data was the "statistical modeling of panel data by using a fixed-effects model, in which there is a dummy variable for each city and year, except the first year and city to avoid perfect collinearity." This method resolved many of the issues that previous studies had in dealing with the variables of the data (Kovandzic, 2005).

The results of Kovandzic's study provided little evidence that concealed carry weapon laws impact violent crime rates. This is contradictory to Lott's findings but in line with other studies, such as the one by Rosengart, et al. "The results for the aggregate SI law time-trend variable imply an average increase of 0.2% in aggravated assault for each additional year SI laws are in effect, for a net effect of 1% higher aggravated assault rates after 5 years." The authors also found that there was no decrease in robberies with the increased presence of SI laws. These results were found to be consistent even when different criteria were used to filter the data. The overall result of this survey, which included numerous tests using different variables, was that concealed carry weapon laws have little effect on crime rates (Kovandzic, 2005).

In conclusion, there is no significant change on crime rates when concealed carry weapon laws are passed. These studies show that by slightly changing the criteria, altering the filtering of the data used in the analysis, or using different analysis techniques, different results can be produced that indicate that the crime rates either increased or decreased after the law was implemented in comparison to what it was before. In fact, many of the studies on the effects of concealed carry weapon laws are based in part on the data Lott collected, differing only in analyzation approach and/or additional updates in data collection; all of them produced different results. If concealed carry weapon laws had a major impact on crimes, it would be easy to see the change in the rates. In reality, though, there are many factors that effect crime rates, and concealed carry weapon laws are just a minor one.

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