

Concealed carry laws and assault weapons bans do not have a significant effect on the gun-related murder rate at the state level

*In the wake of the Newtown massacre, 2013 saw a reinvigorated debate about the need for gun control legislation, most prominently featuring calls to renew the Federal Assault Weapons Ban and to enact concealed carry laws. **Mark Gius** looks at the effects of these two types of restrictions on the gun-related murder rate. He finds that the assault weapons ban had no significant effect on state-level murder rates and that states with restrictive concealed carry laws actually had higher murder rates than their counterparts with less restrictive laws.*



On December 14, 2012, a young man carrying a Bushmaster XM15-E2S semi-automatic rifle shot his way into an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, killing 26 people, twenty of whom were children. Soon after this tragic event, there were calls for stronger gun control laws at both the state and federal levels. One of the measures that was considered at the federal level was a revival of the 1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban, which expired in 2004. This assault weapons ban was part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 and outlawed some types of semi-automatic weapons and prohibited large capacity magazines that held more than ten rounds of ammunition. Even though the President and many others supported a revival of this ban, no new gun control legislation was enacted at the federal level. At the state level, however, several new laws banning or severely curtailing the possession of assault weapons were enacted.

Although assault weapons bans were the primary type of gun control legislation that proponents of gun control were advocating in the post-Sandy Hook era, there are, of course, many other types of gun control. One controversial type of gun control measure that was common years ago but, in recent years, has become much less prevalent is the concealed carry weapons law. These laws concern how permits are issued to individuals who want to carry concealed handguns. There are four broad types of concealed carry laws. The first is unrestricted; individuals in these states do not need a permit to carry a concealed handgun. The



A Bushmaster XM15-E2S M4 Style Carbine. Credit: Mika Järvinen (Creative Commons BY 2.0)

The next type is a "shall issue" law. In states with these laws, a permit is required to carry a concealed weapon, but state and local authorities must issue a permit to any qualified applicant who requests one. The third type of law is "may issue." In a "may issue" state, local and state authorities can deny requests for concealed carry permits, even requests are from qualified applicants. Finally, there are some states that do not allow private citizens to carry concealed weapons. All of these laws vary in restrictiveness depending upon how states interpret and enforce them. In addition, some cities and counties have more restrictive concealed carry laws than their home

states.

In a [recent study](#), I attempted to determine if existing or recently enacted assault weapons bans and concealed carry laws have any effects on gun-related murder rates. I decided to focus on these two types of laws because they have changed the most over the past thirty years. After analyzing the data, I found that states that had more restrictive concealed carry laws had higher murder rates than states with less restrictive laws and that assault weapons bans had no significant effects on murder rates at the state level. I also found that during the Federal Assault Weapons Ban period (1994-2004), state-level murder rates were 19 percent higher than they were in the non-ban period. These results are significant because I looked specifically at the gun-related murder rate. Most other researchers looked at either the violent crime rate, which is not disaggregated into gun-related violent crime for states, or the homicide rate, which includes justifiable killings and state-sanctioned killings. My results are more pertinent and significant because I focused on the crime rate that is most affected by gun control legislation.

Are these results surprising or unexpected? Yes and no. The lack of an effect on the part of state-level assault weapons bans was expected primarily because so few murders are committed using rifles, and even fewer are committed using assault weapons; most are committed using handguns. The higher murder rates during the Federal Assault Weapons Ban probably reflected the inadequacy of the federal law. The 1994 law allowed many guns that technically were illegal under the statute to remain in circulation because they were produced prior to 1994. In addition, many gun manufacturers made minor modifications to their weapons in order to make them legal under the 1994 statute. Finally, this period (1994-2004) coincided with the end of the crack epidemic that was sweeping America's cities and marked the beginning of a long downward trend in the murder rate.

What about the concealed carry law results? Although somewhat unexpected, these results suggest that restrictive concealed carry laws did not have the intended effect of lowering murder rates that legislators had hoped for. In addition, it is important to note that the majority of studies on this topic find that restrictive concealed carry laws do not reduce violent crime rates. There may, of course, be other explanations for these results. Laws may be ineffective due to loopholes and exemptions. The most violent states may also have the toughest gun control measures.



America's fascination with guns and gun control laws is not going to stop anytime soon. Even though violent crime rates are at their lowest levels in decades, some believe that arming themselves will reduce the level of crime, while others believe that disarming others will do the same. Clearly, the issue of the effectiveness of gun control legislation in reducing an already low crime rate warrants additional research. Unfortunately, such evidence may not reduce the rancor or tension in the debate over gun rights versus gun control.

*This article is based on the paper "[An examination of the effects of concealed weapons laws and assault weapons bans on state-level murder rates](#)" which appeared in *Applied Economic Letters*, January 2014, pp. 265-267.*

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