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John Woods

Violence Prevention Activist and Scientist

Posted: February 14, 2011 06:00 PM



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How to Lie With Statistics: Concealed Handgun Statistics Do Not Account for Recidivism

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Lawmakers in Texas are pushing legislation again this session that would force higher education institutions to allow the concealed carry of firearms. A key argument in the campus concealed carry debate is one of statistics: will concealed handgun licensees raise the extremely low violent crime rate on college campuses?

Advocates of concealed handgun licensing have long cited [statistics](#) that suggest those with permits to

carry are more responsible and law-abiding, on average, than the public. The statistics are at best misleading, and at worst represent an apples-to-oranges comparison.

The [Texas CHL](#) requires classroom training, range time, fingerprinting, and the same sort of criminal background check used for firearms purchase. Boosters argue that these requirements lock in licensees as upstanding, responsible individuals for life. Seemingly supporting this argument are [statistics](#) from the Texas Department of Public Safety, which misleadingly compare conviction *counts* instead of conviction *rates*; the reports fail to mention that CHL holders are a relatively small portion of the population.

In fact, licensees do commit crimes, as the DPS reports demonstrate, [including](#) on college campuses. Certain convictions - not arrests, note, but convictions - result in revocation of individuals' carry permits. The Texas Department of Public Safety used to make available conviction rates of CHL holders for weapons-related offenses, but several years ago, the gun lobby successfully lobbied the Legislature to hide such statistics. They argued that the complicated new law had been misunderstood by many licensees.

But the real statistical problem lies in the comparison in felony conviction rates between the general public (21-and-older) and concealed handgun licensees. This type of comparison is often referred to as a "two-island model," referring to similar populations from two islands, where no one ever moves from one island to the other. Herein lies the flaw: individuals are frequently moving between the general population and the CHL subset - in both directions - so the two-island model is inappropriate.

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Proponents of concealed carry rest their arguments on the filter that prevents high-risk genpop individuals from moving to the CHL "island." If the filter is successful, they say, only law-abiding citizens will be licensed.

They neglect to address the lack of an effective filter in the other direction. A CHL holder may commit a crime - and faced with either poor lawyers, a good prosecutor, or strong evidence - that individual reverts to the general population. The relevant felony conviction is added to the CHL tally, but - importantly - the statistics do not follow the ex-licensee through repeat offenses.

Recidivism is an old problem in criminal justice. A 2002 Department of Justice [study](#) reported a re-arrest rate of 67.5% - as high as 78.8% for auto thieves - within three years of release from prison.

So, a more accurate comparison would examine the group of individuals who have at some point possessed concealed handgun licenses, in tandem with a random selection of people who never sought licenses. The study would have to be done retrospectively, taking into account recidivism over a period of at least a decade.

The concealed handgun licensing program is not without merit. It is possible that an appropriately chosen filter could identify individuals who are unlikely to commit crimes not just on the basis of a past blank slate. Such filters are less important at, say, age 40, where many have become settled in their habits, than at age 21, when most people are still making youthful mistakes. This hypothesis finds support in the DOJ recidivism study, which notes a negative correlation between age and re-arrest.

But the CHL training should not be compared to the Basic Police Officer Class (BPOC) in Texas, or subsequent in-service coursework required of all peace officers. More importantly, the [NICS](#) database background check for carry licensing and firearms purchase must not be confused with the type of background checks carried out by law enforcement for potential employees - which [involve](#) reference checks, a psychological evaluation, a polygraph, and several months of supervised training.

In conclusion, lawmakers should think carefully about the [minimum age](#) for concealed handgun licensing. In particular, they should be sensitive to major lifestyle changes - such as going off to college - that could disrupt established behavioral patterns.

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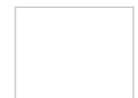
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Rooster Coburn 05:56 PM on 2/17/2011

241 Fans

Gun safety education throughout the school circular would be far more effective than any kind of prohibition.

Start with Eddie Eagle in kindergarten and then work up through junior and young adult NRA gun safety and handling classes.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER**MattB291** 02:04 AM on 2/16/2011

7 Fans

Normally, and I know this is unusual for a progressive, but I don't really spend a lot of time arguing about gun control, except maybe assault rifles. I think as someone here said, it probably is too late to close that barn door. I would further submit that if you reduce or eliminate some percentage of CHL holders, those newly disenfranchised will carry illegally, just perhaps not to city hall. That said, universities and other higher-ed institutions are something of a unique case in my mind. The university environment is supposed to foster a free exchange of ideas, even controversial ones, even ones that lead to heated arguments. This is one of the reasons that the tenure system exists, so that professors will not fear being dismissed because their ideas or research or whatever runs contrary to the administrations opinion. I just can't see how we can increase the number of guns on campus and not diminish that exchange of ideas. Regardless of whose carrying them. Are you going to get into heated debate and take the risk that the guy you argue with is the one who will lose his mind and pull out his weapon? I get on a plane, there's a tiny chance of a crash, but I don't go bang on the engine to tempt fate, right? Yes, I know there will be some guns always unfortunately, but having more guns, the sheer psychology of it, can only diminish the college environment, in my opinion.

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Dimensio 03:22 PM on 2/16/2011

170 Fans

Normally, and I know this is unusual for a progressive, but I don't really spend a lot of time arguing about gun control, except maybe assault rifles.

Assault rifles are already substantially restricted by federal law.

I just can't see how we can increase the number of guns on campus and not diminish that exchange of ideas.

Are you able to demonstrate that an "exchange of ideas" is diminished on college campuses where the carrying of concealed firearms by lawfully licensed individuals is not prohibited?

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Dimensio 04:36 PM on 2/15/2011

170 Fans

Perhaps Mr. Woods would consider a more valid study one that examined revocation rates and revocation causes for concealed weapon permit holders. While such data may not be available for the state of Texas, other states do report such statistics.

In Utah, 0.4% of issued concealed weapons permits were revoked in 2004. 0.02% of issued permits were revoked for "weapons-related" offenses. North Carolina reports revocation of only 0.2% of permits since adoption of a "shall issue" concealed weapons permit system. As of 2006 0.8% of permits issued in the state of Kentucky have been revoked for any reason. In a three-year period, beginning with the implementation of a "shall-issue" concealed weapons permit system, 0.2% of permits were revoked in Oklahoma. In 2001, 0.2% of issued concealed weapons permits in Indiana were revoked.

Because a felony conviction is a sufficient, but not necessary, condition for revocation of a concealed weapons permit, revocation rates allow for an upper limit of the number of concealed weapons permit holders who are subsequently convicted of a felony offense. Mr. Woods's concern of imbalance in felony convictions is valid, an accurate study may be conducted through analysis of the percentage of the population that has ever been convicted of any felony offense. I am certain that, if Mr. Woods's criticism of concealed weapons permit holders is valid, he will be able to demonstrate that the percentage of the United States adult population who are felons is equal to the average percentage of concealed weapons permits that have been revoked across all states where such "shall issue" permit systems are implemented, allowing for the assumption that all such revocations were for felony offenses.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER
John Woods 05:36 PM on 2/15/2011
 67 Fans [Follow](#)

I think you raise an excellent point about revocation. I don't have the graph handy, but in Texas, revocations are much higher for young people than everyone else. There's less correlation among the very old, but I have a feeling that's statistical noise due to lack of licensed 80+ers.

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Jim Duggins 02:18 PM on 2/23/2011

0 Fans

John, can you provide support for this comment from the article?

The Texas Department of Public Safety used to make available conviction rates of CHL holders for weapons-related offenses, but several years ago, the gun lobby successfully lobbied the Legislature to hide such statistics.

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Douva 01:56 PM on 2/15/2011

15 Fans

In an op-ed published on The Huffington Post, John Woods, president of Students for Gun Free Schools, questions statistics showing that concealed handgun license (CHL) holders are significantly less likely than members of the general population to commit violent crimes. Woods basis his challenge on the fact that a conviction of a CHL holder typically results in the revocation of the person's license, meaning that even if a license holder is very prone to violent or criminal behavior, any crimes committed subsequent to his or her first conviction will be counted in the "non-license holder" category, rather than in the "license holder" category.

If concealed carry advocates used these statistics to claim that person "A," who has never committed a crime and who possesses a concealed handgun license, is less likely to commit a crime than person "B," who has never committed a crime and who has never applied for a concealed handgun license, Mr. Woods' argument might be valid. But that's really not the point being made by concealed carry advocates. The point being made is that the CHL vetting process weeds out those individuals most likely to commit a violent crime—the criminal element responsible for most crimes of any type. And it's that very vetting/revocation process that ensures that a license holder who commits a crime doesn't remain in the "license holder" category for long.

READ THE REST HERE: <http://www.campuscarry.com/2011/02/15/concealed-carry-statistics-more-solid-than-opponents-interpretations/#content>

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER
John Woods 12 minutes ago (12:16 AM)
 67 Fans [Follow](#)

You have fundamentally misunderstood the article. Also, I did provide an example, and if you want statistics, you can look here to see why there aren't any:
<http://www.legis.state.tx.us/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=77R&Bill=HB2784>

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HUFFPOST COMMUNITY MODERATOR

Angelus2007 12:46 PM on 2/15/2011
 141 Fans [Follow](#)



You write

"will concealed handgun licensees raise the extremely low violent crime rate on college campuses?"

So you admit that violent crime on college campuses is extremely low; yet, when advocating gun control, people like you, and Helmke and others from Brady Campaign like to point out VT, and NIU and other colleges where guns were used as a reason for more control. You can't have it both ways, either crime is so low at colleges, that the rare incident really has little to do with current gun laws. Or current gun laws are such a problem and we have violent crime at colleges.

Which is it? If crime is that low, shootings at college campus so rare, we should not infringe on everyone others rights to own a gun. Would we stop air travel after every plane crash? No, because they are so rare it would be wrong to ban air travel. Don't use things like VT as an example for gun control, if you are going to dismiss it when making this argument, buy saying violent crime on colleges is very rare.

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**HUFFPOST BLOGGER****John Woods** 05:41 PM on 2/15/201167 Fans [Follow](#)

You are building a straw man by conflating different types of gun control.

A campus gun ban is not going to have the same effect as better background checks. They are to deal with somewhat different segments of the population. Better background checks keep the guns out of the hands of mass shooters. Campus gun bans keep people from doing stupid things, like bringing guns into classrooms, where they could be used in moments of passion and anger by typically-responsible people.

Then, you could also look at background checks on concealed handgun licenses. If you improved these types of checks, or required a psychological evaluation, you might screen out people who believe they are responsible enough to carry on campus but in actuality are not responsible.

[Reply](#)[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)**grossmont325** 01:40 PM on 2/16/2011

14 Fans

because of reporting problems==Loughner and Cho were NOT disarmed

[Reply](#)[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)**MSROADKILL612** 12:08 PM on 2/15/2011

22 Fans

Wow, you guys sure like your guns, and this is the pinko HP.

I can see where you are coming from (I dont like bullies, thugs, tailgaters and thieves either), but jeez., it must be weird being: superficial, humorless and polite with strangers (even the blatantly rude ones). Law abiding citizens have a bad days too (its a very stressed country).

Maybe the big question is "why does our society produce so many of them that we need to use the citizenry as vigilantes because the police are so overwhelmed".

We are talking about concealed weapons, which are for the sole purpose of offing fellow citizens at a safe distance over a real or imagined slight - even at college or at a bar half full of drunks. How can you breathe?

Its like israel where mom packs an uzi to take the kids to school. You seem a nation at war with each other. I have lived there (israel/jordan), its oppressive. Cops carrying machine guns - yew.

Good luck to a black man who exercises his second amendment rights against a white man in good old Dixie. It is only an amendment after all!

Face it, we are now hearing a lot about the rapacious inequality and injustice in america, now that the (literate, web connected) middle class has discovered they were only guest members at the country club.

Sorry. Am sure I have offended many. Just an alternative viewpoint from the safety of my (hopefully anonymous) keyboard.

[Reply](#)[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)**Dimensio** 04:38 PM on 2/15/2011

170 Fans



Perhaps your position would be better supported were you to utilize facts, rather than hyperbole, to justify it.

[Reply](#)[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)**rikilii** 04:44 PM on 2/15/2011

85 Fans

Maybe the big question is "why does our society produce so many of them that we need to use the citizenry as vigilantes because the police are so overwhelmed".

It has nothing to do with how overwhelmed the police are. Unless you want to put cops on every street corner and in every room of every building, they'll never get there in time to protect you from criminals, because criminals go out of their way to avoid places where cops

are present.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

srheard 10:41 AM on 2/15/2011
68 Fans



The Texas law now restricts concealed weapons carry from a number of locations, including school, government buildings, polling places on election day, etc. Why only remove schools from that list? Why not the Governor's mansion and State Legislative offices? If legislators knew that any visitor to their work place could be carrying, wouldn't that make them feel safer? Or are they more worthy of safeguards than students are? Why not remove the restriction on the State Capital building first. If that works out, THEN consider lifting the ban on schools.

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Douva 01:17 PM on 2/15/2011

15 Fans

Look again. Texas law not only doesn't prohibit concealed handguns in government buildings; it actually prohibits state and municipal government properties (other than public schools and court houses) from restricting concealed carry on the premises.

In fact, licensed concealed carry IS allowed in the legislators' workplace. They're not even allowed to restrict concealed carry in their own offices.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/12/us-texas-guns-idUSTRE71B2LC20110212>

http://www.campuscarry.com/pdf/the_case_for_campus_carry_in_texas.pdf#page=6

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

srheard 02:40 PM on 2/15/2011
68 Fans



Douva,

I was reading the 2001-2002 statutes and as your references show, they have clearly been made less restrictive since. I stand corrected, and I thank you for pointing that out.

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GroovyChristian 09:49 AM on 2/15/2011

3 Fans

The author is interested in the crimes that are committed by ex-CHL holders. This is a moot point when talking about Texas legislation that would allow CHL holders to carry on college campuses since these ex-CHL holders would not be allowed to carry.

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rikilii 11:56 AM on 2/15/2011

85 Fans

Not to mention the fact that the number of ex-CHL holders is negligible compared to the general population. So even if you somehow factored them in to the analysis, you wouldn't come close to explaining the 4 to 5-fold difference in criminality between the CHL holders and the general population.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

John Woods 05:24 PM on 2/15/2011
67 Fans [Follow](#)

I don't believe it is a moot point. People with CHLs are supposedly more responsible than other individuals, and that's been a major point of discussion during the dialog on campus carry.

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Kurt 08:09 AM on 2/15/2011

61 Fans [Follow](#)

Please, we need to stop bashing the poor, defenseless gun owners and weapons makers. EVERYONE needs a gun, it will make certain society becomes very polite, just like Tombstone was about the time of the OK Corral. Of course, we will need rules for gun fights, instead of random gun battles in bars, the myriads of horse corrals in local neighborhoods, or street corners like we have now. I suggest bringing back dueling but putting them on TV. Insult someone, get challenged to a duel, go on local TV. I envision the end product being sort of like the Jerry Springer Show but with guns.

Moreover, to paraphrase Shaw: guns are necessary to the health of a community they keep order. Or rather Cops use them to control crime which is the same way of putting it. Millions of people go to gun ranges and shoot targets so they can reduce stress which they cannot otherwise handle. Guns enable the private militias, armies, to protect our nation's borders in the dead of night, a thing no sane person would do at ten in the morning. IS IT the weapon makers' fault that this inestimable gift, the personal weapon, is deplorably abused by less than 1% of the population? I think not.

Just remember as the Beatles once said, "Happiness is a warm gun."

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

John Woods 05:25 PM on 2/15/2011
67 Fans [Follow](#)

You quote The Beatles in an argument about gun violence? How appropriate, given John Lennon's fate.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

Sam Damon 07:47 AM on 2/15/2011
35 Fans



There are already guns being carried by criminals on campus and everywhere else in the US. Allowing the good guys to carry isn't going to endanger anyone. Is it possible a good person may shoot you by accident? Sure, anything is possible. But who would you rather take your chances with, the good guy or bad guy? You have to pick one. The bad guys removed the "no guns on campus" option so that choice is off the table. With all the pressing matters before us we need to stop wasting time on pointless feel good issues.

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MNKen 10:51 AM on 2/15/2011

300 Fans



"Is it possible a good person may shoot you by accident? Sure, anything is possible. But who would you rather take your chances with, the good guy or bad guy? You have to pick one."

You have to pick one? Really? Did you read this before posting it? Hmmm...do I want to be possibly shot/wounded/killed by a good guy or a bad guy? Man that is a tough choice. Can you give me some time to decide?

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HUFFPOST COMMUNITY MODERATOR

lisakaz2 12:15 PM on 2/15/2011
1138 Fans



Apparently it'd be news to you that a concealed gun carrier in AZ came close to sh--ting one of the people disarming the g-nman in the Tucson incident. It would have been his mistake of who the perp actually was. But that couldn't actually happen, could it?

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OldSFMJT 02:52 PM on 2/15/2011

32 Fans

"lisakaz2" wrote: "Apparently it'd be news to you that a concealed gun carrier in AZ came close to sh--ting one of the people disarming the g-nman in the Tucson incident."

Wrong! Didn't happen at all as you present it! The CCW individual you cite, in point of fact, was unable to immediately discern who was the gunman in the incident and NEVER drew his firearm. Learn the facts before posting bogus cr@p!

Old SF MJT

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Dimensio 04:39 PM on 2/15/2011



170 Fans

Not drawing a firearm due to a rational assessment of a situation is not logically equivalent to "coming close" to engaging in a negligent shooting.

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rikilii 05:24 PM on 2/15/2011

85 Fans

Could a concealed carrier accidentally shoot the wrong person? Possibly. Has it ever happened? Apparently not (unless you count the police, that is).

Here's what that concealed carrier *actually did*: While buying cigarettes in the Walgreen's pharmacy next door to the Safeway he heard gunfire from the parking lot. Despite being in a rather safe location, he ran *toward* the gunfire to see if he could help. By the time he got there, the gunman had already been seized, so he helped the crowd gain control of him. He never drew his gun, he never pointed it at anyone, and he certainly never even came close to shooting anyone.

But he did risk his life to help those people, and that's all I need to know about him.

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molonlabe 03:55 PM on 2/16/2011



93 Fans

Classic. Only someone unwilling to recognize the facts can spin a law-abiding citizen, carrying a concealed weapon and using discretion in deciding not to shoot because he could not clearly recognize or engage the target into a "but but but Blood In The Streets!(tm) argument.

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Ryan Gray 07:15 AM on 2/15/2011

15 Fans

Another issue - in my mind - is that situational stress cannot be underestimated. I know many police officers and military personnel train for combat situations, but when the stress of that situation unfolds I doubt they are calm and 'know' just what to do. Instead they rely on their strength of training.

Are we to assume that any regular aged college kid with a CHL license, no matter their maturity, will actually be able to respond to some crazy situation in a way that is not potentially more crazy? Indeed, if this hypothetical person decides to act out against a 'gunman' and mistakenly shoots and kills an innocent classmate, in a vain attempt to be a hero, do they face criminal charges?

I have heard it said, 'You cannot protect against crazy'. But you can train for it and learn from experiences of the past. I would rather put my faith in the highly trained police officers that work at and near college campuses everyday, rather than a hypothetical CHL license holder that just might be in the right place and in the right frame of mind to do any good.

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RedneckLiberal 08:15 AM on 2/15/2011

44 Fans

'Highly trained'? I think you vastly overestimate the amount of training police officers receive. Many law enforcement officers are underpaid, poorly trained and don't exactly qualify as a marksman. Experience is also lacking - most officers never fire their weapon outside of a shooting range.

I'm certainly not saying that a random college student with a concealed carry permit is going to perform well in a situation involving a shooter, but don't expect your average law enforcement officer to do much better.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

John Woods 05:30 PM on 2/15/2011

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This comment about training is absolutely not true on college campuses, or in Texas in general. Indeed, the University of Texas System has its own police academy and imposes many additional requirements on its officers. You should look up the Basic Police Officer Class.

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GroovyChristian 09:56 AM on 2/15/2011
3 Fans

First of all, a CHL holder is responsible for every round he or she fires. If the CHL holder shoots and kills an innocent person, he or she could be charged with manslaughter. Second, these "crazy" individuals with CHLs can legally carry in banks, hospitals, movie theaters, grocery stores, and churches. Why would someone with a CHL all of a sudden lose his or her mind when stepping on a university campus?

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c-tom 12:32 AM on 2/16/2011
78 Fans

Why wouldn't killing an innocent person lead to a murder charge?

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rikilii 10:37 AM on 2/15/2011
85 Fans

We have 20+ years of experience with millions of people in this country being licensed to carry firearms, and as far as I know, there are few (if any) examples of a concealed carry licensee shooting innocent bystanders when acting in self-defense.

You can put your trust in police officers all you want, but if experience tells us anything, they won't be there to protect you until it's too late.

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 **HUFFPOST BLOGGER**
John Woods 05:31 PM on 2/15/2011
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These records are not kept. It's nearly impossible to track down that kind of information.

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dhinds 12:55 AM on 2/15/2011 
142 Fans

I have lived in places where carrying a gun was like wearing a watch and I can tell you that people thought twice before offending anyone else.

Carrying a gun carried a sense of responsibility with it - but I can't speak for all situations.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER
Joe Berner 11:20 PM on 2/14/2011 
26 Fans

Claiming recidivism as a reason that they're being undercounted is ridiculous. If a former police officer commits a felony, is it counted as a police officer committing a crime?

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 **HUFFPOST BLOGGER**

 **John Woods** 05:33 PM on 2/15/2011
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It certainly is. The police departments take it very seriously and generally have a second look at their hiring process if this happens.

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grossmont325 10:35 PM on 2/16/2011

14 Fans

the stats I've seen show that CCW holders are convicted LESS often than LEOS

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

Joe Berner 03:03 PM on 2/17/2011
26 Fans



I'm unclear about your answer. My question was in regards to national statistics on crimes committed by police officers (if they are even kept. I honestly do not know), if your answer was to this, can you provide a source for the statistics, and the methodology showing that crimes committed by former officers are also counted?

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Patriot Henry 07:19 PM on 2/14/2011

16 Fans

"In conclusion, lawmakers should think carefully about the minimum age for concealed handgun licensing."

I agree. Make it 18.

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GroovyChristian 10:00 AM on 2/15/2011

3 Fans

I agree. Most people have no problems with an 18-year-old driving an M1 Abrams tank in defense of our country. But for some reason, an 18-year-old carrying a 9mm pistol for personal protection is out of the question. (fortunately, in Texas active-duty military are exempt from the CHL age restriction)

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

blacksmithn 11:50 AM on 2/15/2011
313 Fans



Last time I checked, M1 tanks weren't available for over the counter purchase.

Maybe the law is different in Texas, though.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

John Woods 05:33 PM on 2/15/2011
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I think many people have problems with sending teenagers off to war, actually.

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Ohio9 07:13 PM on 2/14/2011

60 Fans

"So, a more accurate comparison would examine the group of individuals who have at some point possessed concealed handgun licenses, in tandem with a random selection of people who never sought licenses."

That would be pointless. Once they get a conviction and lose their CCW permit, they are no longer

CCW holders and thus no longer part of the issue. Any subsequent convictions would be meaningless to the CCW issue since they would not effect their ability to carry a concealed handgun. It would still be banned either way.

"But the CHL training should not be compared to the Basic Police Officer Class (BPOC) in Texas, or subsequent in-service coursework required of all peace officers."

Who said it should?

"More importantly, the NICS database background check for carry licensing and firearms purchase must not be confused with the type of background checks carried out by law enforcement for potential employees - which involve reference checks, a psychological evaluation, a polygraph, and several months of supervised training."

Again who said it should? Why are you bringing up such pointless strawman issues? The only one making the comparison is you.

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Jugulum 07:30 PM on 2/14/2011

0 Fans

"That would be pointless."

See my comment. There's a point for the question John was looking at--i.e. "How well is the initial filter/screening working?". But yeah, the more relevant question is, "How likely is that someone legally carrying a concealed weapon will commit a crime?" Which is what will help answer the main issue John started with, "will concealed handgun licensees raise the extremely low violent crime rate on college campuses?"

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