

Permitless open carry laws may lead to more firearm-related suicides

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In states that relaxed firearm laws to allow openly carrying a loaded firearm in public without a permit, significantly more people died by firearms and suicide than in states without permitless open carry laws, according to study findings [published](#) in the *Journal of the American College of Surgeons*.

In this study of death data from all 50 states, researchers found that a change to permitless open carry laws within the nine-year study period was also strongly associated with increases in both the rate of firearm-related suicide and the total suicide rate. Most suicides each year were due to firearms, the investigators reported.

"Our analysis suggests that because of the change in the law, which provides easier access to firearms, we saw an increased firearm suicide rate and total suicide rate," said principal study author Jose J. Diaz, MD, FACS, trauma medical director at Tampa General Hospital. Dr. Diaz is also a professor of surgery at the University of South Florida, Tampa, where the study was conducted.

Multiple studies have shown associations between specific firearm laws and their impact on firearm-related deaths. For example, requiring a permit to purchase a firearm is associated with a decrease in firearm-related homicide, and universal background checks and ammunition background checks are associated with a decrease in total firearm mortality.

Dr. Diaz said he and his research team focused their study on permitless open carry laws because these laws have become more common in the U.S. but remain understudied.

For this study, the researchers evaluated states' annual rates of total

[firearm-related deaths](#), total suicides, and total homicides from 2013 to 2021. Death statistics came from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System.

The investigators also performed a causal analysis to estimate the effects of a state's [policy change](#) to open carry laws that require no permit. The researchers excluded states that enacted permitless open carry before 2013. Therefore, they compared data from states that changed to permitless open carry during the study with states that maintained laws banning permitless or all open carry.

Key findings

- During the study period, five states switched to permitless open carry laws, 19 states prohibited open carry or require a permit, and the other 26 states already allowed permitless open carry before 2013.
- Total firearm deaths in all 50 states increased from 33,636 in 2013 to 48,830 in 2021, a 45% increase.
- Analyses showed significant associations between a change to permitless open carry laws and total rates of firearm fatalities and suicides.
- Among states that changed to permitless open carry laws, causal analysis found an approximately 57% increase in total suicide rates and an 18% increase in suicides by firearm during the study period.

The causal analysis found no association between permitless open carry laws and firearm-related homicides.

Caution in interpreting results

"Because the study was retrospective, meaning it used past data, we cannot say that changing to more permissive open carry laws was a definitive cause of increased rates of suicide by firearm," Dr. Diaz said.

Additionally, Dr. Diaz noted that the COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced their findings. He cited the widely reported social isolation and poorer mental health observed during and after the pandemic.

However, past studies support their results by showing an association between ease of access to firearms and increased risk of firearm-related [suicide](#), according to the article.

The bottom line, Dr. Diaz said, is that "changes in firearm laws have potential repercussions that we do not anticipate."

More information: Emily A Grimsley et al, Transition to Permitless Open Carry and Association with Firearm-Related Suicide, *Journal of the American College of Surgeons* (2024). [DOI: 10.1097/XCS.0000000000000959](#)

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