



Positive Impacts of Handgun Purchaser Licensing Laws on People Who are Black

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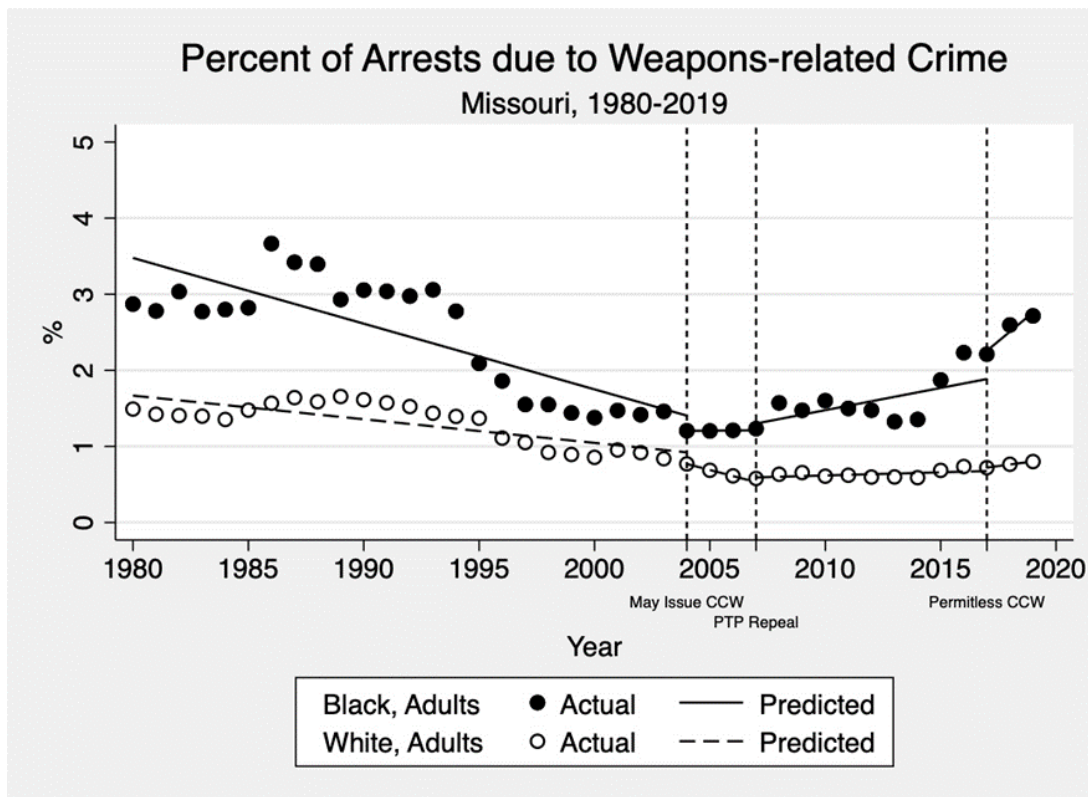
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Firearm violence has a devastating impact on the health, safety, and life prospects of Black, Hispanic, and Native American populations. Firearm homicide is the leading cause of death among Black boys and men ages 15-34 years in the United States.¹ In Oregon for the period 2000-2020, relative to non-Hispanic white people, rates of firearm homicide victimization are 8 times higher among non-Hispanic Black people, twice as high among Native Americans, and 77% higher among Hispanic people.² From 2019 to 2020, the number of Black homicide victims in Oregon rose by 150%.² Relative to white populations, Black Americans have rates of murder perpetration that are six times as high and rates of arrests for weapons violations (nearly all of which are illegal gun possession – carrying a concealed firearm without a permit or possession by a prohibited person) are four times as high.³ These racial disparities in victimization and offending are driven by long-standing structural racism creating concentrated social and economic disadvantages found to increase rates of violence.^{4,5}

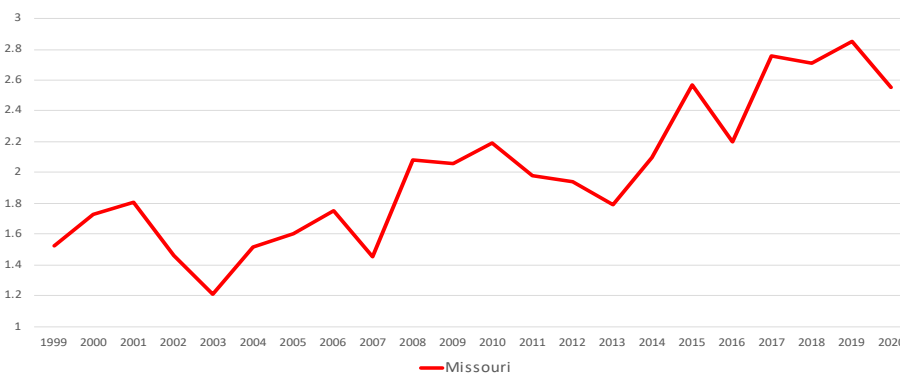
Handgun purchaser licensing laws are upstream policies designed to prevent firearms from being diverted to the underground gun market where they are likely to be used to commit crimes of violence by prohibited persons. Studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals demonstrate that handgun purchaser licensing laws reduce the diversion of guns for criminal use.^{6,7,8} For example, an evaluation of Maryland's handgun purchaser licensing law led to a 76 percent decrease in guns recovered in crimes within 12 months of retail sale from a Maryland gun dealer.⁶ A survey of individuals with experience in Baltimore's underground gun market found that 40 percent thought that the law made it harder to obtain guns.⁶ The data in these studies come from traces of guns recovered from criminal suspects in arrests for crimes in which Black people are over-represented and that contribute to gross disparities in incarceration.^{9,10} It is important to note that these arrests are principally for illegal gun possession, not charges for not having a license to purchase a handgun. By reducing the diversion of guns for use in crime, handgun purchaser licensing reduces arrests and should thereby reduce incarceration that disproportionately impacts Black Americans.

Missouri's repeal of its handgun purchaser licensing law in August 2007 provides evidence for how the law had deterred gun trafficking, arrests, and firearm homicides. Within two years of the law's repeal, diversions of guns for criminal use within a year of retail sale doubled.⁸ The figure below shows the share of arrests of Black adults and White adults that were for weapons offenses in Missouri with three policy changes indicated with vertical lines – Right to Carry in 2003, repeal of handgun purchaser licensing in 2007, and Permitless carry in January 2018. This measure of weapons offenses had been trending down for Black adults, but then increased after handgun purchaser licensing was repealed. Weapons arrests as a share of all arrests for white adults were unchanged and the difference between the changes following licensing repeal between these two racial groups was statistically significant.



Studies have shown that this repeal was associated with a sharp increase in firearm homicide rates in Missouri with estimates ranging from 17% to 47%.^{11,12} Figure 2 below shows the ratio of firearm homicide rates among Black Missourians versus that of all Black Americans from 1999 through 2020. After fluctuating around 1.5 (indicating a 50% higher rate in Missouri vs. the US), the ratio jumps to 2.1 in 2008 after the licensing law was repealed and eventually climbs to 2.8 in 2019 demonstrating how much homicide victimization risks increased after the licensing law was repealed among Black Missourians relative to Black Americans generally. One study of the impact of Missouri’s repeal of handgun purchaser licensing found that increases in firearm homicides were concentrated among Black victims.¹³ More broadly, several studies have found that handgun purchaser licensing laws are associated with reductions in firearm homicide victimization,^{9-11,14,15} a problem that disproportionately robs Black men of their lives.¹ Finally, it is worth noting that national surveys show that 77 percent of Black adults support handgun purchaser licensing laws.¹⁶

Ratio of Firearm homicide rates for People who are Black in Missouri vs. US, 1999-2020



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- ³ Federal Bureau of Investigation. Crime in the United States, 2019. <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/tables/table-43> Accessed July 27, 2022.
- ⁴ Jacoby SF, Dong B, Beard JH, Wiebe DJ, Morrison CN. The enduring impact of historical and structural racism on urban violence in Philadelphia. *Social Science & Medicine*. 2018;199:87-95. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2017.05.038.
- ⁵ Krivo L, [Peterson R D](#), [Kuhl DC](#). Segregation, Racial Structure, and Neighborhood Violent Crime. *American Journal of Sociology*. 114(6), 2009.
- ⁶ Crifasi CK, Choksey S, Buggs S, Webster DW. The initial impact of Maryland's Firearm Safety Act of 2013 on the supply of crime guns in Baltimore. *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal for the Social Sciences* 2017;3(5):128-140. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7758/rsf.2017.3.5.06>
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- ⁸ Webster DW, Vernick JS, McGinty EE, Alcorn T. "Preventing the Diversion of Guns to Criminals through Effective Firearm Sales Laws," pages 109-122 in Webster DW, Vernick JS, Eds. *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.
- ⁹ David Olson. [Illegal Firearm Possession: A Reflection on Policies and Practices that May Miss the Mark and Exacerbate Racial Disparity in the Justice System | Duke Center for Firearms Law](#) 2022.
- ¹⁰ Pfaff, John F., author. *Locked In : The True Causes of Mass Incarceration—and How to Achieve Real Reform*. New York: Basic Books, 2017.
- ¹¹ Hasegawa RB, Webster DW, Small DS. Bracketing in the Comparative Interrupted Time-Series Design to Address Concerns about History Interacting with Group: Evaluating Missouri's Handgun Purchaser Law. *Epidemiology* 2019 May;30(3):371-379. doi: 10.1097/EDE.0000000000000989.
- ¹² McCourt AD, Crifasi CK, Stuart ES, Vernick JS, Kagawa RMC, Wintemute GJ, Webster DW. Effects of Purchaser Licensing and Point-of-Sale Background Check Laws on Firearm Homicide and Suicide in Four States. *American Journal of Public Health* 2020;110:1546-1552. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2020.305822.
- ¹³ Williams, MC Jr. Gun Violence in Black and White: Evidence from Policy Reform in Missouri. New York University Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, December 29, 2020. [Missouri Gun Violence WP December 2020-2.pdf \(morganwilliamsjr.com\)](#)
- ¹⁴ Crifasi CK, Merrill-Francis M, McCourt A, Vernick JS, Wintemute GJ, Webster DW. Association between Firearm Laws and Homicide in Large, Urban U.S. Counties, *Journal of Urban Health* 2018 Jun;95(3):383-390. doi: 10.1007/s11524-018-0273-3. Correction: Oct 2018; 95 (5):773-776. 10.1007/s11524-018-0306-y
- ¹⁵ Rudolph KE, Stuart EA, Vernick JS, Webster DW. Association between Connecticut's permit-to-purchase handgun law and homicides. *American Journal of Public Health*, 2015;105(8):e49-54. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2015.302703
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