



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on March 14, 2016

Misery in Missouri? Claim: Looser Gun Laws Leading to More Murder

Gun-control laws have been killed off in the Missouri legislature in recent years, and more residents are being killed in the streets. That's the story, anyway.

One of the storytellers is Jonathan M. Metzl, professor of sociology and psychiatry and the director of the Center for Medicine, Health, and Society at Vanderbilt University. After outlining loosened Missouri gun restrictions, such as easing prohibitions on concealed and open carry and eliminating municipalities' power to enact their own gun control, he [writes](#):



What followed was a state of affairs that the *New York Times* has described as a “[natural experiment](#)” testing whether more guns led to more safety and less crime.

Instead, according to research, the opposite occurred, in as much as gun deaths soared when it became easier for people to buy and carry firearms.

A team of researchers led by Daniel Webster, director of the [Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research](#), [analyzed](#) extensive crime data from Missouri and found that the state's 2007 repeal of its permit-to-purchase handgun law “was associated with a 25 percent increase in firearm homicides rates.” Between 2008 and 2014 the Missouri gun homicide rate rose to 47 percent higher than the national average.

This sounds like a smoking gun for anti-Second Amendment-rights activists. But it's more like a cherry-picked misfire. As economist and authority on firearms issues John R. Lott Jr. [wrote](#), refuting Webster's conclusions:

While it is true that the murder rate in Missouri [rose 17 percent relative to the rest of the U.S. in the five years after 2007, it had actually increased by 32 percent during the previous five years](#). The question is why the Missouri murder rate was increasing relative to the rest of the United States at a *slower rate* after the change in the law than it did prior to it. Missouri was on an ominous path before the law was ended.

Simply looking at whether murder rates were higher after the law was rescinded than before misses much of what was going on. Most likely, getting rid of the law *slowed* the growth rate in murders.

... Missouri's violent crime rate fell 7 percent faster than the violent crime rate for the rest of the United States from 2006 to 2012. [Emphasis in original.]

Metzl also mentioned Missouri's loosening of background checks. On this Lott informs, “There is already ample research on these universal background checks across *all* the states ... [and] it shows no reduction in murder rates from these expanded background checks. Indeed, there was even a slight 2



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percent increase in murder rates.” (Emphasis in original.)

In reality, there’s no correlation between stricter gun-control laws and lower homicide rates. As I [wrote](#) last year in a piece about a largely ignored [Harvard University study that contradicted the gun-control agenda](#):

There are nations with far stricter gun-control laws than the United States but higher murder rates; along with Russia, Mexico and Brazil are examples. There are also countries with high gun-ownership rates but very little homicide, such as Israel and Switzerland (which has [the world’s ninth-lowest murder rate](#)).

And while gun-control zealots portray the United States as a wild west of murder and mayhem, our nation actually ranks only 98th in homicide rate on a [list of 194 countries](#) — in the bottom 50 percent. Of course, it’s true that the U.K., often cited by gun-grabbers, has an even lower rate.... It’s seldom pointed out, however, that New Hampshire has both a far higher gun-ownership rate than the U.K. but a *lower* murder rate.

As for Missouri, its sometimes-rising murder rates *aren’t* a statewide phenomenon — they’re a St. Louis-Kansas City phenomenon, as the map found [here](#) shows. Yet more can be said. Consider, for instance, a study conducted by Richard Rosenfeld, a University of Missouri-St. Louis criminologist who regularly consults with St. Louis police. He found, [wrote](#) the *Riverfront Times* in October 2015, “that half of St. Louis’ violent crime was concentrated on just 5 percent of city blocks.” And, the paper continued:

A *Riverfront Times* analysis of police data certainly reveals a pattern: Since 2008, about 80 percent of homicides have occurred in just a third of city neighborhoods.

... When it comes to homicides in general, it’s worth noting where this year’s jump is occurring. Our statistical analysis shows the bulk of it — 72 percent, to be exact — has happened outside the downtown area and north of Highway 40.

... By contrast, dozens of neighborhoods in the central and southern corridors of the city have seen no more than three homicides since 2008. Some, such as South Hampton and Wydown Skinker, have seen zero.

In addition, murders are relationally and demographically “localized” as well. Not only are murderers and victims usually acquaintances, but they’re also inordinately young, male and, as the *Times* also wrote, “90 percent of murder victims from January 2014 through August 2015 were black.... As a group, homicide defendants very closely mirror the victim pool: Ninety-five percent of defendants in 2014 were black.” The paper also quotes St. Louis police captain Mike Sack as relating that in “2014, about 91 percent of homicide victims had a prior criminal history.... ‘There’s no evidence that homicide has spread out to the general population,’ he says.”

In other words, unless the less restrictive gun laws applied only to small swaths of major cities, the young, or blacks, it’s a bit silly to blame them for increased homicide in Missouri.

But then what is the cause? First note that, as the *New York Times* [reported](#) last year, there was a murder spike in not just St. Louis, but other major cities such as Baltimore, New Orleans, and Milwaukee. As for St. Louis, the *Riverfront Times* points out that 2008 saw the introduction of cheap, snortable heroin into the city, and “as with any illegal narcotics market, disputes often end in violence,” the paper wrote. At the same time, a budget crunch inspired the city to shrink its police force in 2012,



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an action criminologists say leads to higher crime rates.

Many experts also cite the “Ferguson Effect.” St. Louis, Baltimore, and Milwaukee were all sites of protests over police shootings of black criminals, and some analysts believe this has led to less aggressive policing in such places.

Yet Professor Metzl, purportedly a man of medical science, doesn’t deal in statistics and facts but in emotion. He says he’s concerned about how “guns change the ways that people engage with each other” and that greater gun freedoms have “forced nonarmed [sic] citizens to adapt in ways that ranged from acceptance to anxiety to avoidance.” He then mentions that a Missouri proposal to allow firearms in classrooms is problematic because professors have to challenge “students to step beyond their comfort zones” and cites a statehouse legislator who worries about colleagues who can now “carry concealed weapons during heated debates on the House floor.” We may note, however, that virtually all — if not all — our deadly school shootings have been in supposed “Gun Free Zones.” And while some may chuckle imagining politicians self-culling, do we really fear a spate of such happenings? If Missouri’s legislators are that unhinged, perhaps they shouldn’t be packing laws any more than heat.

Metzl also mentions one Jeff Fromm, who, fearing the “road rage” of the armed, now tries not to “pass in front of anyone at a stoplight.” While I doubt Missouri’s laws will inspire inter-vehicle firefights, is Fromm’s a bad adaptation? As Robert Heinlein said, “An armed society is a polite society.”

Then there’s the black Vietnam veteran who, Metzl tells us, thinks twice about shopping at Sam’s Club ever since he saw “armed white men strolling through the aisles.” (As to this, Metzl’s article at *Raw Story* is [attended by a picture](#) of an angry, tie-wearing Caucasian businessman brandishing a gun. Because, you know, we all walk down the street saying “Watch out! There’s a businessman there!”)

Reflecting St. Louis, however, 93 percent of black homicide victims nationwide are killed by other blacks. And with many if not most of the rest murdered by Hispanics, the veteran’s worries simply are unfounded. As a psychiatrist, perhaps Metzl would do more good by helping people deal with these irrational fears.

And no fears were more irrational than those of a Missouri mother who now reconsiders bringing her kids on shopping trips and the aforementioned legislator, who’s concerned about a gun-rich environment’s effect on the “psyches of our children.” For most of America’s history, guns were virtually everywhere, with New York City schoolboys even taking rifles on the subways (until the 1960s) because they had target practice after school. And children’s “psyches” were fine.

Of course, many might say that city dwellers were different back then. For sure, and so were the psychiatrists. As Dr. Thomas Sowell [put it](#), “Guns are not the problem. People are the problem — including people who are determined to push gun control laws, either in ignorance of the facts or in defiance of the facts.”



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