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Campus Carry and Constrained Behavior: Faculty and Students' Perceptual Responses to Campus Carry Laws

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ABSTRACT AND ARTICLE INFORMATION

Historically, policy discussions and decisions by lawmakers have failed to sufficiently consider the emotional and behavioral reactions of campus community members and how these reactions might shape the academic environment when crafting campus carry laws. Such considerations are especially relevant given the paucity of data on whether open carry laws reduce crime. The current study, which surveyed students, faculty, staff, and administrators at two Pacific Northwest universities (one in Oregon and another in Washington) during the 2016 – 2017 academic year, expands on past research to include variables that measure one's position on campus and state context. This study also expands on past research that focused primarily on support or opposition to campus carry measures, to include a more nuanced look at what various members of the campus community perceive will be the consequences of campus carry measures. Findings show that both students and faculty perceive negative consequences of campus carry laws and that faculty members would constrain their behaviors more than students if campus carry were allowed. A discussion of control variables and the implications of these findings are explored.

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Colleges and Universities have long valued the academic freedom of faculty, as well as fostered the creation of classrooms where students can freely explore a variety of perspectives as part of their educational journey (*Keyishian v. Board of Regents of the University of New York*, 1967; *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 1957). The ability to teach material from a variety of different perspectives, in a safe environment, is a foundational element of higher education (*Keyishian v. Board of Regents of the University of New York*, 1967; *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 1957). Similarly, exposure to multiple perspectives allows students to explore diverse ideas while developing information literacy and their own perspectives (DeBrabander, 2016; Friesen, 2016; Lewis, 2017).

Recent increases in school shootings (Cannon, 2016) have threatened the higher education environment. In an effort to increase safety on campus, several states have passed campus carry laws, either allowing guns to be carried on campus or giving colleges and universities the option to allow guns on campus, while other states have laws that ban firearms on campus entirely (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). Past research has primarily focused on opposition for campus carry (Hassett et al., 2020), but more nuanced research is needed that includes the perspectives of faculty, staff, administrators, and students and that captures how campus carry laws will change the university environment (Scherer et al., 2022). The current study uses a survey of university students, faculty, administrators, and staff¹ from two universities in the Pacific Northwest to assess support for campus carry laws and to explore the relationship of the primary role of an individual on campus (faculty/university employee or student) on perceptions of the impact that campus carry laws have on the classroom environment.

Literature Review

School shootings across the United States grab headlines and provoke policy debates on how to maintain safety on college and university campuses. Within these debates are concerns about how various gun-related laws will impact academic freedom and the open learning environment for students (Arrigo & Acheson, 2016), yet few studies have explored these concerns. According to other researchers, “The campus community’s emotional and behavioral reactions are also relevant; unfortunately, these concerns appear not to have been sufficiently considered in policy discussions” (Cavanaugh et al.,

2012, p. 2246). As such, this literature review will begin with data on gun violence on college campuses, discuss current campus carry laws, and then review perceptual research on support for campus carry laws and behavioral responses.

School Shootings

Although shootings on college campuses are still relatively rare, a report by the Citizens Crime Commission of New York City found that the number of shootings and fatalities has been trending upward since the early 2000s (Cannon, 2016). Almost two-thirds of these shootings occurred in Southern states (Cannon, 2016). Additionally, according to a database from the Center for Homeland Defense and Security (2019), researching as far back as 1970, there were more school shooting incidents on K-12 campuses and more resultant deaths in 2018 than in any other year on record. The increase in school shootings on both K-12 and college campuses has been used to argue both for restrictive gun legislation and, alternatively, campus-carry laws that would ease current restrictions on gun carrying in school settings. This contrast suggests an underlying ideological struggle. This complex debate is structured by political ideology (Jang et al., 2014; Kruis et al., 2020), personal gun experience, beliefs about the purpose and effectiveness of gun ownership acting as a deterrent to crime (Britto & Noga-Styron, 2015; Jang et al., 2014; Shepperd et al., 2018), and concern about the impact of concealed weapons on the learning environment (Arrigo & Acheson, 2016) as well as several demographic factors.

Campus Carry Laws

The carrying of firearms by students, staff, and faculty on U.S. college and university campuses is known as campus carry. Each individual state has the discretion to mandate its own laws on campus carry, and, at present, three different types of campus carry laws have been enacted across the country, which include permitted by law (mandatory laws), prohibited by law (non-permissive laws), and campus discretion states (institutional laws) (Harnisch, 2008).

As of 2022, 11 states allow for the carrying of firearms on public college and university campuses, 16 states ban concealed-carry on public college and university campuses, and the remaining 23 states have some combination of institutional and/or non-permissive laws on campus carry (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). In the cases of Oregon and Washington, the states included in the current study, such criteria are codified in statutory law. Table 1 lists the type of campus carry law for each state.

Table 1: Campus Carry Law on U.S. College and University Campuses

Campus Carry Law	
Mandatory Laws (guns allowed)	Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Oregon, Tennessee*, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin.
Non-Permissive Laws (guns banned)	California, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, and Wyoming.
Institutional Laws (campuses can choose)	Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia.

Note. *Tennessee allows faculty members with licenses to carry weapons on campus, but the law does not apply to students or to the general public. Source: National Conference of State Legislatures (2019).

Oregon is an open carry state where individuals are generally legally entitled to openly carry a firearm, without a license or permit, beginning at the age of 18 (Oregon Revised Statutes [ORS] 166.250). However, local cities and counties are authorized to place restrictions on persons who open carry without a concealed handgun license (ORS 166.291). Oregon differs slightly from other states in that it has very few restrictions on where a concealed handgun can be carried. For example, there is no state law that bans the carrying of loaded firearms in a vehicle, without a license, provided that the firearm is not concealed or not readily accessible. In 2011, the Oregon Court of Appeals ruled that public universities were no longer authorized to prohibit firearms on their grounds – specifically open areas on campus. Yet, they could still prohibit them inside buildings (*Oregon Firearms Educational Foundation v. Board of Higher Education and Oregon University System*, 2011). This effectively legalized the carrying of firearms on campus within the Oregon University System. However, by internal policy, the Oregon State Board of Higher Education continues to prohibit the possession of firearms in classrooms, buildings, dormitories, and sporting and entertainment events by students, employees, vendors, ticketholders, and those who reserve, lease, or use Board property.

Washington is also considered an open carry state. Despite restrictions on openly carrying a firearm (Revised Code of Washington [RCW] 9.41.270), no Washington statute directly prohibits open carry in the state. Therefore, in Washington, openly carrying a firearm in public is legal without a concealed carry permit. Nonetheless, a concealed carry permit is required to carry a handgun in a vehicle such as a car, a bus, or a train (RCW 9.41.050[2][a]). The possession or use of firearms on college and university campuses in Washington is prohibited except for authorized university purposes, unless prior written approval has

been obtained from the university chief of police, or any other person designated by the president of the university (Washington Administrative Code [WAC] 478-124-020).

In both Oregon and Washington, there are no laws that require firearm owners to register their firearms. In other words, laws in both states neither require nor prohibit firearm registries. Even so, state registries can be a good gauge of overall gun ownership trends within a state. Oregon, with a population of 3.8 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) has 74,722 registered guns (CBS, 2018; McCarthy et al., 2017), whereas Washington, with a population of 6.7 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) has 119,829 registered guns (CBS, 2018; McCarthy et al., 2017). These figures suggest that there are more guns, per capita, in Oregon than there are in Washington. In terms of deaths due to injury by firearms per populations of 100,000, Oregon has more deaths (12.6 per 100,000) than does Washington (10.7 per 100,000) (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2019).

Perceptions of Campus Carry Laws

The campus carry issue is ever present in the news media, and one that is debated in state legislatures and on college and university campuses across the country. Proponents of campus-carry laws and policies argue that allowing people to possess firearms on public university and college campuses will create safer environments by deterring would-be shooters and by enabling students, faculty, and staff to defend themselves and others in the event of a shooting, which, in turn, will make them feel more secure (Fennell, 2009; Klukowski, 2014; Kopel, 2014; Moody, 2014; Vasek, 2014). Opponents of campus-carry laws argue that permitting guns on college and university campuses will create unsafe environments (Barnes, 2017; Cavanaugh et al., 2012; DeBrabander, 2016; Horwitz, 2016; Lewis, 2017; Patten et al., 2013;

Smith, 2012; Wolcott, 2017). They worry that people will draw weapons in response to merely perceived or minor threats, or when angry, and that guns might accidentally discharge, causing injury (DeBrabander, 2016). Both proponents and opponents of campus carry laws argue that this is a matter of life or death. Proponents define the life-or-death struggle over campus carry as a matter of security, or protection against threats, whereas opponents define it as a matter of safety, or being safe from threats (Morgan, 2018).

Much of the campus carry research is limited to measures of support or opposition. A recent review of the literature in this area (Hassett et al., 2020) found that three variables consistently show a strong relationship with support for campus carry laws: conservative political ideology (Republican and Libertarian political identification; Bennett et al., 2012; De Angelis et al., 2017; Hassett & Kim, 2020; Hayes et al., 2021; Jang et al., 2014; Kruis et al., 2020; Nodeland & Saber, 2019; Patten et al., 2013; Schildkraut et al., 2018; Thompson, Price, Dake, & Teeple, 2013; Thompson, Price, Dake, Teeple, et al., 2013; Verrecchia & Hendrix, 2018); personal experience with firearms, including measures of gun ownership (Bennett et al., 2012; Jang et al., 2014; Kruis et al., 2020; Nodeland & Saber, 2019; Patten et al., 2013; Satterfield & Wallace, 2018; Schildkraut et al., 2018; Thompson, Price, Dake, & Teeple, 2013; Thompson, Price, Dake, Teeple, et al., 2013; Verrecchia & Hendrix, 2018); and variables that captured risk, fear, or concern about victimization (Jang et al., 2014; Nodeland & Saber, 2019; Schafer et al., 2018). Additionally, males consistently show more support for campus carry laws than females (Cavanaugh et al., 2012; Hassett & Kim, 2020; Jang et al., 2014; Patten et al., 2013; Satterfield & Wallace, 2018; Schafer et al., 2018; Schildkraut et al., 2018; Thompson, Price, Dake, & Teeple, 2013; Thompson, Price, Dake, Teeple, et al., 2013; Verrecchia & Hendrix, 2018). In terms of age, one study found that older individuals showed more support (Nodeland & Saber, 2019) and others found that younger individuals showed the most support (Cavanaugh et al., 2012; Hassett & Kim, 2020). The results for media consumption are similarly mixed with Cavanaugh and colleagues (2012) finding a positive correlation between media and support of campus carry and De Angelis and colleagues (2017) finding no effects. Living in a state with existing campus carry laws increased support for these measures (Hassett & Kim, 2020). Attitudes toward the police have not been related to support for campus carry laws (Hassett & Kim, 2020; Nodeland & Saber, 2019).

Behavioral Responses to Campus Carry

Friesen (2016) predicted that, based on his experience as an educator in Texas, where a campus carry law was approved in 2016, more professors would take measures from changing the way controversial topics are covered to submit letters of resignations and that some students would transfer to other campuses. In two qualitative studies following the 2016 law change in Texas, Somers and colleagues (2017) and Jones and Horan (2019) reported that many faculty participants had changed grading, office hours, and classroom discussions to avoid the risk of gun violence. As laws continue to change, more research is needed to see how faculty, staff, and students respond to campus carry laws.

Fewer studies have included measures of the perception of students' likely behavioral responses to campus carry legislation. Schildkraut and colleagues (2018) found that almost one-quarter of students noted that they would consider attending another school if campus carry legislation passed. Those who remain committed to attending their current university if campus carry laws were in effect were more likely to be men, Republicans, and gun owners (Schildkraut et al., 2018). Cavanaugh and colleagues (2012) reported that approximately one-quarter of students are uncomfortable with concealed firearms on campus, while Beggan (2019) reported that individuals were split about whether the campus would be more dangerous. Three studies found that men, Republicans, and gun owners or those who have previously carried a gun were more likely to perceive that they would feel safe or comfortable on a campus that allowed concealed weapons (Cavanaugh et al., 2012; Patten et al., 2013; Verrecchia & Hendrix, 2018). Extending this finding, Shepperd and colleagues (2018) specified that individuals who owned guns for protection would feel safer on campuses with campus carry laws than non-gun owners or those who owned guns for non-protection reasons. Finally, Satterfield and Wallace (2018) showed that students who were male, White or Hispanic, gun owners, and who had pro-gun attitudes would be more likely to carry a firearm if the law permitted them to do so. Hayes and colleagues (2021) found that individuals who support campus carry, males, and individuals who felt the police do not prevent crime were more likely to carry a firearm on campus.

Only a small number of studies have included university role in models of perceptions of campus carry laws, and they found that faculty/administrators and staff were significantly less supportive of campus carry laws and more supportive of denying admission or expelling students based on criminal history or potential threat (Beggan, 2019; Kyle et al., 2017;

McMahon-Howard et al., 2018). Beggan (2019) adds context to this finding by reporting on quotes in the media from faculty and administrators that suggest campus carry laws increase fear, constrict free speech, and may lead to professors leaving universities with campus carry laws in place. Similarly, in a study in Georgia, Scherer and colleagues (2022) found that faculty were more likely to have experienced a negative impact when guns were allowed on campus than students. Faculty who were younger and who were politically moderate experienced more negative impact than other faculty. For students, females, Blacks, Hispanics, individuals with disabilities, younger students, liberal and moderate students, and those who took online classes all reported more negative impacts because of campus carry. Unfortunately, Scherer and colleagues (2022) used different outcome measures for faculty and students so the two groups could not be directly compared. Collectively, these findings suggest that students' support of campus carry laws is different from that of faculty and staff and that this may also lead to different behavioral responses to campus carry laws. Further research is needed to explore this issue.

A couple of studies have also included the impact of state context on support for campus carry laws. In a study using 2009 data on Washington and Texas, two states that were, at the time, considering campus carry legislation, Cavanaugh and colleagues (2012) found that although most students were uncomfortable with the prospect of guns on campus, Texas students were significantly more comfortable than their Washington counterparts. Since the time of this study, Texas has passed mandatory campus carry laws, and Washington has passed institutional campus carry laws giving individual universities the option to choose whether guns are permitted on campus (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019).

A similar study compared the attitudes of students in New York (a state with non-permissive laws in place) and Georgia (a state with mandatory laws in place) and found that the attitudes of students largely matched the laws in the state, with students from Georgia significantly more likely to support campus carry than students in New York (Schildkraut et al., 2017). Patten and colleagues (2013) compared campuses in California and Nebraska (both states with non-permissive gun laws in place) and found that surveyed respondents (students, staff, faculty, and administrators) overwhelmingly opposed the option of carrying concealed guns on campus. While one study examined the variation in states from the single region of the eastern United States (Verrecchia & Hendrix, 2018), this is the first study to compare states in the Pacific Northwest.

Current Study

The current study expands on past research that has focused primarily on support or opposition to campus carry measures to include a more nuanced look at what various members of the campus community perceive will be the consequences of campus carry measures. Past policy discussions and decisions by lawmakers have rarely included the emotional and behavioral reactions of campus community members when crafting campus carry laws, and research in this area is needed (Cavanaugh et al., 2012). Three measures of perceptions of the consequences of campus carry laws include 1) feeling secure on campus, 2) changing behavior in the classroom, and 3) refraining from controversial discussions in the classroom. This study also expands on past research by focusing on the variables of campus role and state context to address the following questions: Do individuals perceive that campus carry laws will result in constrained behavior? Is one's campus role related to the perception that campus carry laws will constrain behavior? Does state context influence the perception that campus carry laws will constrain behavior? Exploratory models are tested using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression.

Method

This exploratory study used a cross-sectional survey conducted on two university campuses in the Pacific Northwest in the 2016-2017 academic year – one in Oregon and one in Washington. Although Oregon is a mandatory campus carry state and Washington is an institutional campus carry state, neither of the campuses allowed firearms on campus, with the exception of on-campus firearms storage² facilities in Washington.

Sample

After IRB approval was granted at both universities, undergraduate students, faculty (deans, professors, adjuncts, and lecturers), and staff (secretaries, assistants, counselors, advisors, and information technology associates) in the following majors/programs were included in the study: Legal Studies, Justice Studies, Communication, and Journalism. Schools in Washington and Oregon were selected because the research team had access to two universities in these states, and the campus carry issue was a frequent topic of media and legislative discussion in the Pacific Northwest.² All faculty and staff, and most of the students, were contacted by e-mail and provided with a link to participate in a short (10-12 minute) confidential survey on "Crime, Security, & Freedom." The remaining students, some

journalism/communication students in two large classes on the Oregon campus where one of the authors worked, were given a short introduction to the survey and provided time to complete it. The students in these two classes were not included on the email list but were given the same link to the survey as provided in the email. Those who were emailed the survey were emailed three times: the initial request, followed up by two reminder emails.

The surveys were collected via an online Qualtrics survey. In all, a total of 593 initial survey responses, out of a potential 1610, which includes the total number of emails sent to students, administrators, faculty and staff, and individuals within the two classes that were visited, were collected. After accounting for missing values (i.e., absent survey response data, recorded as blank cells in the SPSS data editor) and outliers,³ 517 survey responses were used in the actual statistical analysis. This is an overall response rate of 32%. The response rate for students was 34% while the response rate for faculty was 23%. Women and Whites were slightly over-represented in the sample compared to the student demographics of both campuses.

Survey

The instrument consisted of a 46-item questionnaire that included three measures of the perception of how campus carry laws would impact the classroom environment, including whether an individual was faculty/staff or a student, comfort with firearms, political ideology, and a variety of regularly used control variables in surveys on perceptions of firearms, as well as crime-related public perceptions. Many of these questions were modified from previous crime-perception studies (Cavanaugh et al., 2012; Patten et al., 2013) to fit a university campus context. All respondents completed the survey online, with no disclosure of their identity to maintain confidentiality. The survey included brief instructions, an informed consent statement, and a reminder that their participation was voluntary. Data were collected in the Fall quarter of 2016 and the Winter and Spring quarters of 2017.

Dependent Variable – Impact of Campus Carry Laws

The dependent variable in this study – impact of campus carry – is a factor score constructed from three questions measuring perceptions that campus carry laws would impact respondents' comfort with, and behaviors within, the campus environment.⁴ Respondents were asked to rate their responses on a 7-point scale to the following statements: 1) If my university allowed individuals to legally carry firearms on campus, I would feel: responses ranged

from 1 - much more **secure on campus** to 7 – much less secure on campus. This item was reverse coded so that 7 reflects a feeling of much more security on campus. 2) If my university allowed individuals to legally carry firearms on campus, it would **change my behavior in the classroom**: responses ranged from 1 – strongly agree, to 7 – strongly disagree. 3) If my university allowed individuals to legally carry firearms on campus, I would **refrain from engaging in controversial classroom discussions**: responses ranged from 1 – strongly agree, to 7 – strongly disagree. Individuals with higher factor scores perceive that they would feel more comfortable with campus carry, while individuals with low scores perceive less comfort and more constrained behavior. A reliability analysis for the impact of campus carry on the comfort on campus items (secure on campus, change my behavior in the classroom, and refrain from engaging in controversial classroom discussion) yields a Cronbach's Alpha of .78. Confirmatory factor analyses indicate that all the indices load on the same component within the construct. Factor-weighted scores were used to create a 3-item impact on campus environment factor score (Mean = 0, *SD* = 1, Range = 4.00). A low score on the index indicates that an individual would feel less secure and that their actions and speech would be more constrained on campus.⁵

Independent Variables

The primary independent variables of interest in this analysis are campus role (student = 0, faculty/staff = 1) and state context (Oregon = 0, Washington = 1). Faculty, staff, and administrators were combined into a single category because the sample was not large enough to analyze them separately. Since previous studies by McMahon-Howard and colleagues (2018), Kyle and colleagues (2017), and Beggan (2019) found that faculty were less supportive of campus carry laws than students, it is predicted that, in the present study, the campus role variable will be negatively related to the impact on campus environment scale. Initial studies that have included measures of state context have found significant results (Cavanaugh et al., 2012; Schildkraut et al., 2017), providing some initial evidence that students attending schools in southern states and states with less restrictive gun laws are more supportive of campus carry laws. No research has been done comparing states in the Pacific Northwest. Comparing Washington and Oregon, states that share a border and perhaps a similar gun culture, provides a unique opportunity to explore this issue.

Control Variables

The study also includes several control variables, shown in Table 2, including demographic

Table 2: Independent Variables Used in OLS Regression Models

Variable	Measurement	Mean	SD
Primary Independent Variables			
Campus Role	1 = faculty staff, 0 = student	.10	.30
State Context	1 = Washington, 0 = Oregon	.23	.42
Control Variables			
Sex	1 = female, 0 = male	.59	.49
Race	1 = Non-White, 0 = White	.35	.48
Age	1 = over 25, 0 = 25 and under	.16	.37
Republican	1 = Republican, 0 = else	.16	.37
Other Party	1 = Other Party, 0 = else	.33	.47
Comfort with Firearms	7-point scale (1 = very uncomfortable, 7 = very comfortable)	3.95	2.01
Crime Concern	7-point scale (1 = very unconcerned, 7 = very concerned)	5.20	1.17
Media Consumption	11- point scale (1 = less than 1 hour, 11 = more than 10 hours)	4.23	1.88
Attitude toward the Police	5- point scale (1 = definitely do not have confidence, 5 = definitely do have confidence)	3.44	1.07

variables and variables that past research has found significant in predicting attitudes toward firearms. Sex was coded 1 = male, and 0 = female. Unfortunately, because of the demographic make-up of the two universities included in the study, there were not enough cases to analyze several racial groups separately. Therefore, race was dichotomized into White (0) and Non-White (1). Similarly, because this study was primarily composed of undergraduate students and campus faculty, staff, and administrators, there was limited age variation and age was dichotomized into 25 and under (0) and Over 25 (1).

Based on prior research on support for campus carry laws (Bennett et al., 2012; Jang et al., 2014; Kruis et al., 2020; McMahon-Howard et al., 2018; Nodeland & Saber, 2019; Patten et al., 2013; Satterfield & Wallace, 2018; Schildkraut et al., 2018; Thompson, Price, Dake, & Teeple, 2013; Thompson, Price, Dake, Teeple, et al., 2013; Verrecchia & Hendrix, 2018), it is predicted that individuals who are more comfortable with firearms will perceive a positive impact of campus carry laws. Comfort with firearms was measured by asking the respondents, "Please rate your comfort level around guns/firearms" with responses ranging from 1 – very comfortable, to 7 – very uncomfortable. This variable was reverse coded so that higher scores represent higher comfort levels with firearms.

Past research has found that one of the most significant predictors of attitudes toward firearms and support for the right to bear arms is political party, with Republicans consistently supporting campus carry laws (Bennett et al., 2012; De Angelis et al.,

2017; Hassett et al., 2020; Hassett & Kim, 2020; Jang et al., 2014; Kruis et al., 2020; Nodeland & Saber, 2019; Patten et al., 2013; Schildkraut et al., 2018; Thompson, Price, Dake, & Teeple, 2013; Thompson, Price, Dake, Teeple, et al., 2013; Verrecchia & Hendrix, 2018). Political party was dummy coded into two variables, Republican (1) and Other Party (1) with Democrat being the reference group for both variables. Crime concern is a possible predictor of support for campus carry laws. This was measured by asking respondents, "How concerned are you about the current crime and victimization rate?" This seven-point scale was reversed coded so that high scores reflect more concern. Past studies have found that perception of victimization risk, which taps more into cognitive judgements than our concern variable (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987), increased support for campus carry laws (Jang et al., 2014; Schafer et al., 2018).

Attitudes toward the police (ATP) was measured by asking respondents, "Do you have confidence in law enforcement preventing and combating crime?" In the original scale, higher numbers reflected a lack of confidence, so this five-point scale was reverse coded so that higher scores reflect more confidence in the police. There is no predicted relationship for this variable because it is possible that individuals who have the most confidence in the police are also those that support the right to bear arms, but it is also possible that those who have the least confidence in the police feel that individuals should be allowed to arm themselves for their own protection. Past research has not found a

Table 3: Percentage of participants who feel less secure, would change their behavior, and refrain from controversial classroom discussions by state and campus role

State and Campus Role	Feel less secure on campus	Change behavior on campus	Refrain from controversial classroom discussions
Full Sample (N=517)	73%	60%	58%
WA Respondents (N=119)	46%	51%	45%
OR Respondents (N=398)	81%	62%	62%
Students (N=466)	71%	57%	56%
Faculty/Staff/Admin. (N=51)	86%	86%	82%

significant relationship between attitudes toward the police and support for campus carry laws (Hassett & Kim, 2020; Nodeland & Saber, 2019).

Research on media consumption and support for campus carry laws is limited and has led to mixed results. Cavanaugh and colleagues (2012) found that individuals who follow violent news stories were more likely to support campus carry laws, but De Angelis and colleagues (2017) found no relationship between media consumption and support for campus carry. Respondents were asked, “In a typical day, how much time do you spend engaged with media and social media (Newspapers, Magazines, Television, Internet, Radio, Video Games, etc.)?” on an 11-point scale from 1 = 1 hour or less to 11 = more than 10 hours a day.

Analysis

To begin the analysis, frequencies of the three variables that make up the impact of the campus carry laws variable (feeling less secure on campus, changing behavior on campus, and refraining from controversial classroom discussions) were examined by state and campus role. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models were then used to test the relationship between 1) campus role and 2) state location on perceived impact of campus carry laws while controlling for a number of relevant variables suggested in the literature. Finally, based on research by Sheppard and colleagues (2018) that found that perceptions of why people owned guns shaped perceptions related to campus carry, a disaggregated analysis was run for individuals with low comfort with firearms and high comfort with firearms.

Results

Preliminary frequencies, found in Table 3, affirmatively answered the initial research question: Do individuals perceive that campus carry laws will result in constrained behavior? Seventy-three percent of individuals responded that they would feel somewhat less secure, less secure, or much less secure on campus, and 60% and 58% of the respondents

agreed (somewhat to strongly, respectively) that they would change their behavior because of campus carry and refrain from controversial discussions on campus. Table 3 also shows that Oregon respondents, relative to Washington respondents, report more perceived insecurity on campuses (46% and 81%, respectively), would be more likely to change their behavior on campus (51% and 62%, respectively), and would be more likely to refrain from controversial classroom discussions (45% and 62%, respectively) with campus carry laws. Faculty, staff, and administrators were also more likely than their student counterparts to feel insecure on campus (86% to 71%, respectively), change their behavior on campus (86% to 57%, respectively), and refrain from controversial classroom discussions (82% to 56%, respectively) with campus carry laws.

OLS allowed for the inclusion of relevant control variables. Model I in Table 4 regresses the control variables on the perception of comfort on campus with campus carry laws. Most control variables were significant and behaved consistently with past research, explaining 34% of the variance as reflected by the R^2 value. Comfort with firearms was the strongest predictor variable (Beta = .419) of the perception of impact of campus carry laws, followed by identifying as a Republican (Beta = .184) rather than a Democrat. Additionally, those who identified politically as an Independent (Beta = .184), relative to the Democrat reference category, and confidence in the police to prevent and combat crime were also significantly positively related to impact of campus carry laws, while concern about the current crime and victimization rate was significantly negatively associated with the impact of campus carry laws. An unexpected finding was that older individuals were significantly more likely to perceive that campus carry laws would negatively impact the campus environment (Beta = -.135). This finding, although in the opposite direction than was predicted, may reflect the campus environment where individuals over the age of 25 are more likely to be faculty and staff. In fact, faculty and staff make up 62% of all individuals

Table 4: OLS Regression Estimates for Perception of Impact of Campus Carry laws on Campus Environment

	Model I Control Variables Only		Model II University Role		Model III State Context		Model IV Complete Model	
	Beta	SE	Beta	SE	Beta	SE	Beta	SE
Sex (1=female)	-.037	.079	-.043	.079	-.042	.078	-.051	.078
Race (1=non-white)	-.005	.076	-.005	.076	-.008	.076	-.010	.075
Age (1=over 25)	-.146*	.101	-.044	.153	-.166*	.102	-.034	.152
Republican	.184*	.112	.182*	.112	.179*	.111	.176*	.110
Other Party	.105*	.083	.095*	.083	.100*	.082	.086*	.082
Attitudes toward Police	.065*	.036	.068*	.035	.045	.036	.044	.035
Crime Concern	-.092*	.032	-.081*	.032	-.089*	.032	-.073*	.032
Media Consumption	-.007	.020	-.012	.019	-.007	.019	-.015	.019
Comfort w/ Firearms	.419*	.020	.412*	.020	.393*	.020	.377*	.020
University Role (1=faculty/staff)			-.136*	.189			-.181*	.191
State Context (1=WA)					.115*	.091	.142*	.092
N-Size	517		517		517		517	
R ²	0.335		.354		.358		.370	

Note. * $p < .05$.

over 25 in this study. Individuals who expressed concern about crime, Democrats, and older individuals were significantly more likely to perceive that campus carry laws would negatively impact the campus environment and their freedom of expression. Conversely, individuals who are comfortable with firearms, Republicans and Independents, and individuals who had more confidence in the police were more likely to feel that campus carry laws would have a positive impact on the campus environment by making it more secure and increasing their comfort in expressing themselves in the classroom. Additionally, race and media consumption were not significant in this model. The lack of a relationship between race and the perception of the impact of campus carry laws may be a result of variations within the two broad racial categories.

The primary university role of respondents was introduced in Model II in Table 4. When university role was included in Model II, the variance explained increased to 35%. Faculty, staff, and administration (Beta = -.136) are more likely to feel that campus carry laws would negatively impact the campus environment by constraining their behavior than are students. The relationship between age and comfort on campus with campus carry laws is no longer significant when university role is included in Model II, although the direction of the relationship remains the same. This suggests that much of the age

effect present in Model I can be explained by the difference in perceptions between university employees and students.

Model III includes the state context variable. State context is a significant predictor of comfort on campus with campus carry laws (Beta = .115) but in the opposite direction than was predicted. Individuals at the university in Washington were more likely to express that they would be comfortable on a campus with campus carry laws than individuals in Oregon. All the predictor variables behave in a similar manner to Model I, except for attitudes toward the police, which is no longer significant.

The complete model, which includes university role and state context, is shown in Model IV of Table 4.⁶ Including both the primary independent variables improves the explanatory power of the model, which explains 37% of the variance in comfort on campus with campus carry laws. Comfort with firearms (Beta = .377) and university role (Beta = -.181) are the strongest predictors of perceived comfort on campus with campus carry laws, followed by identifying as a Republican (Beta = .176), state context (Beta = .142), Independent political party (Beta = .086), and concern about the crime problem (Beta = -.073). In summary, individuals who are not comfortable with firearms, university employees, those who identify as Democrats, those who are affiliated with a university in Oregon, and those who

Table 5: OLS regression estimates for perception of impact of campus carry laws on campus environment disaggregated by comfort with firearms

	Low Comfort with Firearms		High Comfort with Firearms	
	Beta	SE	Beta	SE
Sex (1=female)	-.136*	.098	-.054	.130
Race (1=non-white)	.032	.092	-.050	.132
Age (1=over 25)	-.056	.207	.020	.233
Republican	.125*	.167	.318*	.158
Other Party	.075	.099	.158*	.147
Attitudes toward Police	.008	.044	.126*	.120
Crime Concern	-.118*	.041	-.035	.053
Media Consumption	.092	.039	-.154*	-.034
University Role (1=faculty/staff)				
State Context (1=WA)	-.135	.252	-.306*	.311
Sex (1=female)	.009	.139	.258*	.311
	N-Size	311	206	
	R ²	.107	.327	

Note. * $p < .05$.

are concerned with the crime problem are more likely to believe that campus carry laws will negatively impact the campus environment by making it less secure and limiting speech and behavior on campus.

Table 5 shows the disaggregated PLS regression results for individuals who have low comfort with firearms (scores of 1 = very uncomfortable, to 4 = neither comfortable nor uncomfortable) and those who have high comfort with firearms (scores of 5 = comfortable, to 7 = very comfortable). The two regressions show a stark contrast in the amount of variance explained, with only 11% of the variance in impact of campus carry being explained in the low comfort with firearms model and 33% in the high comfort with firearms model. This suggests that when individuals are generally uncomfortable with firearms, very few variables impact their perceptions of the impact of campus carry. The exceptions are sex, with females (Beta = -.136) who are uncomfortable with firearms feeling less secure and more likely to alter their behavior with campus carry, and Republicans (Beta = .125), who feel more secure and less likely to alter their behavior with campus carry.

For individuals with a high comfort with firearms, several variables predicted their perception of the impact of campus carry laws. Republicans (Beta = .318), members of other political parties (Beta = .158) relative to Democrats, individuals with positive attitudes toward the police (Beta = .126), and

individuals in Washington (Beta = .258) were more likely to feel that campus carry laws would positively impact their campus, while individuals who consumed more media (Beta = -.154) and faculty, staff, and administrators would feel less secure and less comfortable expressing themselves with campus carry.

Discussion

In terms of perception of impact of campus carry laws, comfort with firearms was the strongest predictor of support for such laws. This is in line with prior research regarding support for campus carry laws (Bennett et al., 2012; Jang et al., 2014; Kruis et al., 2020; Nodeland & Saber, 2019; Patten et al., 2013; Satterfield & Wallace, 2018; Schildkraut et al., 2018; Thompson, Price, Dake, & Teeple, 2013; Thompson, Price, Dake, Teeple, et al., 2013; Verrecchia & Hendrix, 2018), which has indicated that individuals who are more comfortable with firearms perceive that campus carry laws will have a positive impact on campus. At the same time, it is contrary to other studies, which have found that even those who own firearms or are comfortable with them, do not want to see guns on college and university campuses (Cavanaugh et al., 2012; Patten et al., 2013). The disaggregated analysis helped clarify this seeming contradiction because it showed that individuals with

low comfort with firearms almost universally felt that campus carry laws would negatively impact the campus environment, while several variables explained significant variation in these perceptions for those who were comfortable with firearms.

Like other studies, the present study found that conservative political ideology was a strong predictor variable for comfort with campus carry laws. This is consistent with past research that found Republican and/or Libertarian political identification to be strong predictors of support for campus carry laws (Bennett et al., 2012; De Angelis et al., 2017; Hassett & Kim, 2020; Jang et al., 2014; Kruis et al., 2020; Nodeland & Saber, 2019; Patten et al., 2013; Schildkraut et al., 2018; Thompson, Price, Dake, & Teeple, 2013; Thompson, Price, Dake, Teeple, et al., 2013; Verrecchia & Hendrix, 2018). However, unlike previous studies (Jang et al., 2014; Nodeland & Saber, 2019; Schafer et al., 2018), the current findings indicate that concern about crime and victimization has a significantly negative association with perceived benefit of campus carry laws. This may be a result of the use of a single-item general concern about victimization measure rather than a victimization risk (Jang et al., 2014; Schafer et al., 2018) or fear of crime measure (Nodeland & Saber, 2019), or it could be a result of this study measuring perceived behavioral changes rather than support or opposition to campus carry laws. Interestingly, media consumption was not a significant predictor variable in the full sample, yet for individuals who had a high comfort with firearms, more media consumption was related with feeling that campus carry laws would lower comfort on campus.

The lack of a relationship between race and the perception of the impact of campus carry laws is consistent with the findings of Cavanaugh and colleagues (2012) but may be a result of the two broad racial categories used in this study. Although Model I and Model II found a significant positive relationship between attitudes toward the police and the belief that campus carry laws would improve the environment on campus, the relationship was no longer significant when state context was included. A comparison of means test showed that individuals working and attending schools in Washington had significantly more confidence in police than individuals working and attending schools in Oregon. This pattern of responses suggests that state context may be influencing both attitudes toward the police and perception of greater freedom and security on campuses with campus carry laws. Attitudes toward the police was also significant in the disaggregated models for individuals who had a high level of comfort with firearms.

Consistent with other studies that have found that younger individuals showed the most support for

guns on campus (Cavanaugh et al., 2012; Hassett & Kim, 2020), this study found that older individuals (those over the age of 25) were significantly more likely to perceive that allowing guns on campus would negatively impact the campus environment. In this case, individuals on campus who were over the age of 25 were more likely to be faculty and staff, whereas those under the age of 25 were more likely to be students. McMahon-Howard and colleagues (2021) found that faculty were less supportive of campus carry laws than students. Unexpectedly, the current findings contradicted prior studies that found that living in a state with existing campus carry laws increased support for guns on campus (Hassett & Kim, 2020; Schildkraut et al., 2017). In the present study, individuals at the university in Washington (the state with institutional campus carry laws) were more likely to express that they would be comfortable on a campus with campus carry laws than individuals at the university in Oregon (the state with mandatory campus carry laws).

The unexpected finding that the university in Oregon, a state with existing campus carry laws and higher per-capita gun ownership (CBS, 2018; McCarthy et al., 2017), showed less support for guns on campus than the university in Washington, a state without state-wide campus carry laws, may possibly be explained by the location and on-campus culture of the specific campuses surveyed. The surveyed university in Oregon is in what is considered to be one of the more liberal areas of the state. Conversely, the surveyed university in Washington is located in what is considered to be one of the more conservative areas of the state. Another factor that may shape these state differences is that 51% of students at the university in Oregon come from out of state, whereas only 7% of students at the university in Washington come from out of state (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

The surveyed university in Oregon attempted to ban the carrying of guns on its campus, but, in 2011, the Oregon Court of Appeals overturned the ban, stating that only the state legislature could regulate the sale, use, and possession of firearms (Cramer, 2014). The university in Oregon has since reimposed the ban on students and employees through contract; however, these contractual prohibitions are not applicable to those visiting campus. On the contrary, there has been a concerted effort by some individuals at the university in Washington to always allow for the concealed carry of firearms. However, at the time that this research was conducted, the possession of concealed firearms, other than en route to and from on-campus firearms storage facilities, was prohibited. It should be noted that Washington State Republican lawmakers have introduced bills in the Washington State Legislature

that would allow qualified adults to carry firearms in schools and universities.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited because the sample only included faculty and students in specific majors, and their responses may be shaped by both the course content of those majors and their desire to pursue careers in journalism, communication, law, and/or criminal justice. In addition, it is likely that students studying communications/journalism and criminal justice/legal studies would have greater exposure in their coursework to the specifics of the campus carry debate than students in other majors, and future research is needed that includes students across all majors. Additionally, the convenience sampling strategy included both email and classroom recruitment, which may have resulted in an overrepresentation of the students recruited in the two large classes. Future research on perceived comfort on campus with campus carry laws should include opinions held by students in all majors, as well as other university stakeholders such as campus police. Future research should also explore differences across majors in attitudes toward campus carry. Additional control variables, such as fear of crime, victimization risk, and support for campus carry laws should also be included in these endeavors.

Although the universities examined here are in different states, another limitation is that they may not represent other universities within these states or throughout the country. Replication is needed in other parts of the country, beyond this regional study in the Pacific Northwest, to determine the generalizability of the present results. These studies should control for whether students are residents or non-residents of the state where they are attending school. Finally, none of the faculty and students in this study worked at or attended a university that allowed campus carry; therefore, the responses represent hypothetical behavioral responses to the idea of campus carry.

Conclusion

Individuals who are not comfortable with firearms; faculty, staff, and administrators; those who identify as Democrats; those who are affiliated with a university in Oregon; and those who are concerned with the crime problem are more likely to believe that campus carry laws will negatively impact the campus environment by making it less secure and by limiting speech and behavior on campus. Overall, the results of the present study, which surveyed campus communities in Oregon and Washington, show that most faculty, staff, and administrators are likely to restrict their behavior if guns are allowed on campus,

which could have implications for academic freedom. This study showed a dichotomy between individuals who are uncomfortable with firearms (just over 60% of the sample) and those who are comfortable with firearms in terms of how they feel campus carry would impact their environments. Generally, those who were uncomfortable with firearms felt campus carry would negatively impact their comfort on campus, and state context and campus role did not have a significant effect on these views. In the model for individuals who were comfortable with firearms, state and campus role, along with several control variables, help explain differing perceptions on the impact of campus carry.

Qualitative studies have reported faculty members responding to their universities' enactment of laws allowing for the carrying of guns on campus by changing their grading practices, where and how often they hold office hours, and the topics that are discussed in the classroom (Jones & Horan, 2019; Somers et al., 2017). These findings add to this growing body of research findings that suggests that for the majority of those who work, study, and live on college and university campuses, firearms will reduce their perception of safety and limit freedom of speech and expression (Patten et al., 2013; Thompson, Price, Dake, & Teeple, 2013; Thompson, Price, Dake, Teeple, et al., 2013). A minority of individuals on college campuses, who are more likely to be students, living in Washington, comfortable with firearms, Republican or another political party than Democrat, supportive of the police, consume more media, and currently feel that crime is not a large problem on campus perceive that campus carry will improve the campus environment. These findings suggest a complicated perceptual divide rooted in ideology and division on whether fewer or more guns are likely to make campuses safer.

This study contributed to the research on campus carry, which consisted primarily of studies on students (Hassett et al., 2020), by including university faculty, staff, and administrators in the sample. Historically, policy discussions and decisions by lawmakers have failed to sufficiently consider the emotional and behavioral reactions of campus community members when crafting campus carry laws (Cavanaugh et al., 2012). Such considerations, as the results of this study bear out, are especially relevant considering that the academic freedom of faculty and the learning environments of students could be significantly impacted by these laws.

Like previous studies (e.g., Verrecchia & Hendrix, 2018), the present study found that the majority of those who are most affected by policies that would allow for the carrying of concealed weapons on campus feel that firearms would negatively affect the campus environment. As

suggested by Noga-Styron and Britto (2022), campus administrators and state and federal law makers should consider not only students' perceptions when making policy that could affect the goals, nature, and character of higher education, but also those of university faculty, staff, and administrators.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Faculty, staff, and administrators were combined into a single category in our analysis. Because the majority of individuals in this category were faculty, the term faculty will be used throughout the paper to differentiate this group from students.
- ² A choice was made to include majors in Criminal Justice/Legal Studies and Journalism/Communications programs because of their likely greater familiarity with the campus carry issue than other programs. As such, and due to the convenience sampling that utilized both email and in-class introduction to the online survey, the findings of this study are not generalizable beyond students in these majors at these two universities.
- ³ A total of 23 outliers were identified by $p < .001$ for Mahalanobis D^2 (a statistic used to test for outliers in the "Save" option of the linear regression procedure in SPSS). These 23 cases were excluded because the respondents consistently provided scores at the lower ends of the 7-point Likert scales (mainly 1 or 2) or at the higher ends of the scales (mainly 6 or 7) whereas the other respondents used the full widths of the scales (from 1 to 7).
- ⁴ Although staff are not as involved in daily classroom activities, many routinely visit classrooms and interact with students in these spaces. In addition, many of the administrators in the sample either also taught classes or would have reason to visit classrooms in the course of their work. A separate analysis was run that excluded staff and the direction and significance of all variables remained the same.
- ⁵ The secure on campus variable was reverse coded so that on all three items a high score reflects the perception that campus carry laws would positively impact the campus environment by making it feel more secure and increase their freedom to express themselves.
- ⁶ Because the survey recruitment involved two separate strategies, the final model was also run including a variable for whether the recruitment occurred in person or by email. The relationships found in Table III, Model IV remained consistent, and neither the significance nor direction of the variables were impacted. That being stated, this control was significant, and individuals recruited in-person were more likely to feel more secure and less likely to change their classroom behavior than individuals recruited by email.