

Report finds stricter gun laws don't prevent law-abiding citizens from getting guns

October 31 2017, by Allie Nicodemo

Massachusetts has some of the most restrictive gun licensing laws in the country. Yet 97 percent of people who apply for a license are still granted one. That's one finding from a new Northeastern University study.

The report, lead by Jack McDevitt, director of Northeastern's Institute on Race and Justice, casts doubt on a popular argument that stricter [gun laws](#) will make it more difficult for law-abiding citizens who want a firearm to purchase one.

"States are concerned that if they have a licensing provision, people will be denied their constitutional rights, and I think Massachusetts is a strong example showing that doesn't have to be the case," McDevitt said.

In the wake of the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School that left 20 children and six adults dead, Massachusetts House Speaker Robert DeLeo, who graduated from Northeastern in 1972, asked McDevitt to lead a commission to improve state gun policies. After eight months of research, McDevitt and his collaborator Janice Iwama, PhD'16, assistant professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts, made 44 recommendations to strengthen the state's gun laws. In 2014, 42 of them were adopted.

The researchers also received a state grant to study how the laws were being implemented, which culminated in this report, submitted Monday to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security.

Their findings show that tougher Massachusetts gun laws led to an increase in license denials from two to only four percent, proving the vast majority of people who want guns are still able to purchase them.

"You can have strong gun laws that prohibit people who have violent histories from getting guns, and you'll still have the vast majority of law-abiding people able to get guns without any problem," McDevitt said.

One of the recommendations McDevitt made in 2014 was to allow police chiefs more discretion in granting gun licenses. Pro-gun lobbyists—particularly spokespeople for the National Rifle Association—have argued this policy would lead to an abuse of power. But the report found no evidence of that in Massachusetts.

"Police seemed to go out of their way to try and give people a license," McDevitt said. "They aren't trying to deny somebody over a small thing that happened when they were a juvenile." Even in communities with the highest rate of licensing denials—Bedford and Boston—only 8 percent of applications were refused. There is even an appeals process if someone gets turned down, McDevitt said.

Massachusetts has reduced the rate of gun deaths by 60 percent since 1994, said John Rosenthal, a Boston real-estate developer and founder of Stop Handgun Violence, a nonprofit that works to prevent firearm violence. According to the latest data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Massachusetts had the lowest rate of [gun deaths](#) of any state in the nation.

"I think it's just common sense. Gun laws that make it harder for kids, criminals, and the dangerously mentally ill to access firearms work to reduce preventable gun injuries and death," Rosenthal said. "I am a gun owner, and to me, it's no surprise that reasonable gun safety laws including more police chief discretion—the very people we empower in

a civilized society to protect us and detect at-risk and potentially violent people in our community—work to effectively reduce [gun violence](#) without any inconvenience to law-abiding gun owners."

Provided by Northeastern University

Citation: Report finds stricter gun laws don't prevent law-abiding citizens from getting guns (2017, October 31) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-10-stricter-gun-laws-dont-law-abiding.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.